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## **Simple, Honest, Happy:**

An Exploration of the Benefits of Farming  
Activities and a Simple Lifestyle for Young  
People in Outdoor Education

**Master Thesis**

**ERASMUS MUNDUS programme**

**TRANS CULTURAL EUROPEAN OUTDOOR STUDIES (TEOS)**

**Department of Physical Education  
Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, 2016  
in collaboration with**





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- Spring Semester 2016 -

Study Program: Transcultural European Outdoor Studies

Host Institution: Norges Idrettshøgskole

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Deadline: 31 July 2016

## **Abstract**

In 1978, Ian Stapleton determined that what young people need most is an escape from the pressure and rushed nature of their daily lives, and he set out to found Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre. Now, almost forty years later Mittagundi is still flourishing and his words ring more true than ever before. Yet, the field of outdoor education often sets its focus on adrenaline driven activities, unintentionally contributing to the fast-paced, accelerated lifestyle that young people lead today. A focus on well-being, living sustainably in tune with nature and self-reflection is often of secondary importance. The aim of this thesis is to explore the benefits of farming activities and experiencing a simplistic lifestyle, and their potential for a more decelerated outdoor educational approach. While farming activities in Europe are increasingly used to enhance well-being for a variety of target groups under the concept of ‘Green Care Farming’, this notation has not yet spread to Australia and the potential for farming activities in outdoor education programmes has yet to be explored.

The empirical section of this study was conducted in April 2016 at the Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre in Victoria, Australia. The participants were girls between 14 and 16 years of age, taking part in a ten-day programme. Using qualitative research methods such as diaries written by the participants in combination with overt observations, the research investigated the benefits of various activities from the view point of the young people.

The research results reveal that young people gain a wide range of benefits from both purposeful farming activities, and experiencing a simplistic lifestyle. It can thus be concluded that integrating farming activities into outdoor education programmes has great potential. It leads to a sense of achievement and provides opportunities for social interaction whilst conducting purposeful activities in nature. However, the well-facilitated adrenaline-driven activity of abseiling also proved to have a great impact on the young-people’s self-esteem and further research into the long-term effects of the benefits is recommended.

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# 1. Introduction

Society today is increasingly fast paced. Globalisation, constant developments and advancing technologies and travel make life easier, but also create complexity and a rushed and pressured lifestyle. The field of outdoor education often contributes to that, with adrenaline driven activities at the very top of the list. In recent years, calls for a change in the approach of outdoor learning programmes with more focus on topics such as sustainability and wellbeing have become louder (Lugg, 2004; Pryor, Carpenter & Townsend, 2005; Payne & Wattchow, 2009). This thesis focusses on farm-based activities and the return to a simplistic lifestyle as an option for a decelerated approach in outdoor programmes.

Farming is an activity largely determined by nature and natural conditions, an activity that we have undertaken for thousands of years. Still today, the landscape determines what type of crops a farmer can plant, and nature largely determines when to plant and harvest. The combination of performing simple tasks manually, the necessity of farm work, the social contact that come with it, and the satisfaction of having completed work according to one's individual ability, the spacious surroundings that imply a sense of freedom, the stress-free environment, the colours of nature and the fresh air create a sense of belonging and a structure and solitude that many vulnerable people in our society need (Pryor et al., 2009; Sempiik, Hine & Wilcox, 2010). As indicated in literature, the return to a simple, holistic lifestyle and partaking in purposeful activities in nature may establish self-confidence, resilience, independence and a love for the outdoors in young people, leading to a more sustainable lifestyle (Stapleton, 1988; Pryor et al., 2009; Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016; Van Elsen, 2010) and thus may deserve to play a vital part in outdoor educational programmes today.

While the potential for using working farms as an institution with a view to educational, social or health settings is increasingly recognised in Europe and also in the United States, the concept has not yet spread to Australia. In Europe, due to less hopeful economic perspectives in the agricultural sector, farmers have had to

find additional ways of income, thus combining the production of agricultural goods with other services (Hassink & Van Dijk, 2006). Australia is a major producer and exporter for agricultural goods. Land use for agriculture increased by 2 percent to 406 million hectares in 2013/ 14 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The concept of Green Care Farming, however, seems largely unknown. While some farms cater for visiting school groups to teach about agriculture as part of the curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority, 2013; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2016), very few agricultural businesses make use of farm-based activities in outdoor educational or health contexts. Yet, there have been debates in Australian outdoor education about slow pedagogy and a more local approach, both aspects that are integral parts of farming activities (Lugg, 2004; Payne & Wattchow, 2009).

Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, set in the mountains in the Australian state of Victoria, is one example of a pioneer-style farm that is used as an outdoor education centre for adolescents in Australia and is the place where the research for this thesis will be conducted. At Mittagundi, the emphasis is on experiencing nature through purposeful activities on the farm without timetables, clocks or competition (Stapleton, 1988; Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016).

Information obtained from this research will provide an insight into the benefits that young people personally gain from undertaking farming activities and experiencing a simplistic lifestyle. It will collect views of participants on the activities offered in the Australian Mittagundi outdoor programme. Further, it will help to evaluate such an approach to outdoor education programmes with a view to the future.



## 2. Literature review

The notion that spending time outdoors is beneficial to people's health and well-being is nothing new. It lies deep within our ancestral roots. When one acknowledges 'nature' as the home to our ancestors, who evolved in a world defined by natural rhythms, it is effortless to imagine that merely being in nature will bring an inherent sense of tranquility to our fast paced lives (Sempik et al., 2010). Yet, humans spend less time interacting with animals and plants than ever before, and while the full consequences are not yet known, exhaustion and decline in health after spending too much time in artificial environments indicate that humankind may not quite be adapted to urban life.

While outdoor education strives to rectify this lack of nature in people's lives, not all are satisfied with the approach that is predominant in outdoor education today. According to Hill (2013), in parts of Australia, like in many European countries, a lot of traditional outdoor education is based on principles of adventure, risk and challenge. However, "moving quickly through places, or from one activity to the next, as some outdoor practices do, may be insufficient to develop a connection or intimacy with place" (Hill, 2013, p. 28). Further, it is not only being in nature but the combination of "the experience of the natural landscape and working within it" (Sempik, 2010, p.15) that has been deemed beneficial to physical and mental health and general well-being. Therefore, some academics and outdoor educators call for a so-called 'slow pedagogy' which allows for dwelling and lived experiences in nature in an embodied way (Payne & Wattchow, 2009).

Farming as an activity, undertaken outdoors, aims to combine these elements and strives to reconnect, especially urban-based, people with nature. The idea of a 'multifunctional agriculture' offering services of an educational, therapeutic, recreational or ecological nature, in addition to primary production has gained increasing popularity in European countries in recent years (Van Elsen, Günter & Pedrolí, 2006; Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014). This part of the literature review aims to provide an understanding of what Green Care farming is and summarise

the benefits that recent studies have established, before focusing on the research questions of this thesis.

## **2.1 Green Care Farming terminology**

Utilising farms for additional services to promote well-being is a broad concept which envelops various approaches. A vast array of services are available, ranging from everyday farming tasks and occupational services to educational activities, animal-assisted interventions and therapeutic horticulture (Meistad & Fjeldavli, 2004; Haugan, Nyland, Fjeldavli, Meistad & Braastad, 2006). They are aimed at different groups of clients, including people with physical or mental disabilities but also educational services for school-age children (Sempik et al., 2010).

Reflecting this variety are different terms which describe similar services (Hlušičková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). While one may criticise that the terms are used in lieu of one another, and are partly overlapping, Hlušičková and Gardiánová (2014, p. 52) acknowledge that it is “difficult to establish a common terminology for all countries, as the situation in each country is based on different aspects”. Granerud and Eriksson (2014) see the linking factor in using nature to attain social, educational or health benefits.

The terms most commonly and oftentimes synonymously used in literature are ‘Green Care’, ‘Farming for Health’ and ‘Social Agriculture’. ‘Green Care’ is often used as an all-encompassing term, enveloping various services that centre around health, welfare or education. Haugan et al. (2006, p. 110) define Green Care as an array of meaningful learning opportunities through primarily practical challenges, undertaken in a tranquil, stress free environment. Comparatively, the Norwegian National Strategy (Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food & Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2012, p. 7) defines Green Care as follows:

“Green Care refers to individually adapted and quality-assured welfare services farms. The services shall stimulate coping skills, development and well-being”.

“Farming for Health” is another term which is commonly used in literature. A criticism of the term is that ‘farming’ is often associated with exploitation of the land (Van Elsen et al., 2006). Yet, it is often used interchangeably with ‘Green Care’. This is prevalent in the book edited by Hassink and Van Dijk (2006), where both terms are frequently used by the various authors. Van Elsen et al. (2006, p. 91) define it as summarising “a wide spectrum of different kinds of social agriculture”.

The term ‘social agriculture’, less ubiquitous but commonly used in Germany (Van Elsen, 2011), is “based on the traditional rural and self-sustainable networks that operated before the modernisation of agriculture in the countryside, and the development of the social welfare system” (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014, p. 52). Stemming from a time when it was necessary for people to take care of each other in their rural neighbourhoods, it has an emphasis on the community factor of such projects. The fact that these farms also create new jobs in a rural setting where it is often difficult to find work is also positively noted (Van Elsen, 2011). ‘Social agriculture’ has a multifaceted approach to agriculture and is usually connected to a social or medical institution (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014).

The term of choice in this thesis is ‘Green Care’ due to its equal emphasis on both the environment and the social aspect of the venture. Furthermore, it is the term most frequently used in the reviewed literature.

## 2.2 Origin

A brief look into the past shows that farms and gardens have been set up alongside hospitals and prisons for centuries. Not only did these farms and gardens produce food for the patients, inmates and carers, they also provided a meaningful occupation offering physical activity, social opportunities, and time for rehabilitation. However, as demand and population rose over time farming became an increasingly commercial activity and technical progress and mechanisation reduced the opportunity for manually ‘therapeutic’ work (Sempik, 2010). Nevertheless, there are still small-scale agricultural businesses in many European countries that opt for offering Green Care services for a number of reasons (Sempik, 2010; Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014).

In most European countries the development of Green Care farming can be described as a bottom-up process mainly initiated by farmers. Due to an increased focus on productivity, the number of farms in general has dwindled in recent years. Many farms that remain are being enlarged and modernised, leaving small farms struggling for financial survival (Meistad & Fjedavli, 2004). Thus, farmers are seeking ways to combine primary production with additional services (Hassink & Van Dijk, 2006). Today, many farmers have a further qualification besides their agricultural training (Haugan et al., 2006). As an example, research by Meistad and Fjeldavli (2004) disclosed that over 40 percent of Norwegian farmers have either a college or university degree. Many of them or their partners work part time as craftsmen or in social professions (Haugan et al., 2006). Such additional qualifications are extremely advantageous when introducing alternative services to farms in order to create an additional income (Vik & Farstad, 2009).

Essentially, small-size farms that use small scale machinery and perform many operations manually are the perfect venue for outsiders to be integrated into farm life (Haugan et al., 2006). “The therapeutic potential of green care is considered to reside within the activities, the setting and the social environment” (Sempik, 2010,

p. 18), making small farms an ideal location with an emphasis on the community aspect.

Furthermore, many European countries suffer from both a severe lack of professionals in the public health sector, and an insufficient number of institutions, which is leading to a greater public demand for improvement. In addition, there are increasing demands for more experiential learning opportunities in the educational sector. Haugan et al. (2006) value farms for the many opportunities they offer in these respects, and suggest that they might be able to fulfil society's needs for alternative arenas in both health care and teaching.

## **2.3 Benefits**

Literature on Green Care is primarily focused on participants who suffer from a physical or psychological condition, behavioural issues, or have criminal backgrounds. There are proven benefits for these participants, however similar beneficial results have been reproduced in studies on students in school based farms (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Van Elsen, 2011), where behavioural, physical and psychological problems have not been an underlying theme.

This suggests that despite the diversity in services provided for mental health patients, and educational services, Green Care participants greatly benefit from the farm based activities regardless of their preconditions, ailments and or past.

### **2.3.1 Physical benefits**

Recent studies have shown that conducting farming activities has several physical benefits. The practical work results in physical fatigue, which participants in Green Care services perceive as satisfying and pleasant (Sempik, 2010; Hlušičková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). Hlušičková and Gardiánová (2014) have noted it to be especially helpful for participants suffering from conditions such as hyperactivity disorder or stress syndrome are able to release excess energy. Participants further observed an increase in strength and mus-

cle as well as raised body awareness (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). In connection to this they found themselves able to perform tasks that they did not think they could physically accomplish (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad, Agdal & Hopfenbeck, 2014). Many farming activities are found to require physical resistance and thus perseverance (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014). Sempik (2010) and Van Elsen (2011) have both found that working with plants, animals and/or conducting farming activities manually is physically and psychologically stimulating because it allows for rich sensory experiences.

The outdoor setting itself is appreciated for its space which implies a sense of freedom and ample opportunity to exercise and explore (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). In Jolly and Krogh (2010) and Granerud and Eriksson (2014) participants further reported a sense of achievement and increased inner strength from having to cope with different weather conditions while conducting work outside.

### **2.3.2 Psychological benefits**

There are a broad range of psychological benefits that can be attained through Green Care Farming. Farming activities are generally perceived as useful work (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). The value therein, according to Granerud and Eriksson (2014, p. 329), “is based on the fact that the participants perform work that needs to be done for other reasons” not simply to keep participants occupied. Hence, these activities have a ‘pull factor’ rather than a ‘push factor’ and make people feel that their efforts are needed and worthwhile (Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Van Elsen, 2011). Sempik (2010) compares these purposeful activities to a work environment, where participants have a daily routine, social opportunities and are required to exercise a certain amount of control. However, they can do so at their own pace in a stress-free environment that lacks the pressure of a ‘real’ work place (Sempik, 2010; Van Elsen, 2011; Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). The structure and

quiet that a rural farm life offers allows young people to unwind from the pressure and demands of the current school system and other struggles they face (Elings, 2011; Kogstad et al., 2014). Depending on the nature of the tasks, participants in Green Care services often get to experience the direct results of their efforts. In gardens they might plant vegetables in spring and harvest them in autumn (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Van Elsen, 2011). When working with animals who are dependent on human care, they receive direct feedback when the animals' needs are fulfilled (Sempik, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). Participants state that they take pride in being partly responsible for the results achieved, with plants grown and animals nurtured. The purposeful nature of the activities thus leads to a strong sense of fulfilment and accomplishment (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014).

The outdoor setting of the work enables Green Care participants to experience the seasonal cycles of nature and its many changes. Sustainable ways of living make them feel in tune with the environment (Sempik, 2010). A deeper nature connectedness is fostered by the development of an open mind towards environmental issues and results in a higher level of care for the environment (Sempik, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). To some, the outdoors are an almost spiritual space, a place where they can enjoy moments to themselves in silence (Kogstad et al., 2014) and regain “a sense of self by being in nature” (Granerud & Eriksson, 2014, p. 332).

Although not always part of Green Care services, working with animals brings additional benefits. Most importantly, animals do not judge people. They accept people the way they are and do not put anyone under undue pressure, making it easier for some Green Care participants to build relationships with animals than with people (Van Elsen, 2011; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). Sempik (2010), Granerud and Eriksson (2014) and Kogstad et al. (2014) all further found that the emotional attachment that people experience, the feeling of be-

ing able to care for an animal, and possibly even the overcoming of fears to do so, lead to a significant increase in self-confidence.

### **2.3.3 Social benefits**

An essential component of Green Care services that has proven to be of utmost benefit is the social aspect. As described in chapter 2.2, it is commonly small-scale agricultural businesses that offer Green Care services. One direct positive effect that might not be achieved to the same extent in a larger business is the sense of belonging and a community feeling that participants develop (Van Elsen, 2011; Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). A closer look at what constitutes this feeling of belonging shows that participants value the farm as an environment of honesty and kindness. People learn to respect each other's strengths and weaknesses, support each other, and have an array of opportunities to socialise whilst performing tasks, such as cooking and eating together (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). Team work and learning from each other is mentioned as valuable, especially with cooperative rather than intrusive leadership as guidance (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). People report feeling "united in common work tasks" (Granerud & Eriksson, 2014, p. 329). Participants feel valued for who they are without being judged based on their condition, and feel equal when leaders assign tasks to them in full confidence that they can complete them competently (Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014). The working environment is marked by an absence of competition with opportunities to learn from mistakes. These aspects reportedly play a vital role in the increased self-esteem of participants (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Sempik, 2010; Van Elsen, 2011; Hlušíčková & Gardiánová, 2014; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014; Kogstad et al., 2014). Participants also speak of a more positive attitude to life due to the farming activities and an overall enhanced mood (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Sempik, 2010; Kogstad et al., 2014).



### **2.3.4 Other benefits**

In addition to physical, mental and social benefits, the acquisition of new skills regarding animal husbandry, plants and general farming activities has been listed as highly valuable (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Sempik, 2010; Granerud & Eriksson, 2014, Kogstad et al., 2014). Participants acquire a more in-depth understanding of the process ‘from field to table’. They see the relationship between man and nature in a different context, and experience the practical work and efforts that are needed in order to produce food. Further, they gain insights into the role of animals in food production. In many cases Green Care clients also obtain a deeper understanding of organic farming methods, self-sufficiency, and insights as to how actions on farms are interconnected (Jolly & Krogh, 2010; Sempik, 2010; Van Elsen, 2011). Jolly and Krogh (2010) and van Elsen (2011) suggest that the individual’s work that directly facilitates food production, in conjunction with the newly acquired understanding of the complex processes involved, often lead to a new appreciation for food.

## **2.4 Conclusion and Research Question**

“One reaps nature's surplus without using it up, but at the same time outings provide positive experiences of nature and opportunities for social fellowship” (Dahle, 2007, p.30/31). What Børge Dahle once said about ‘nature life’ almost perfectly summarises Green Care farming. Indeed, it is a form of lived experience in nature, and literature clearly marks the many aspects that have been found to be of benefit to participants. These benefits are of a very holistic nature, reaching from the physical all the way across to the psychological state of people, fulfilling social needs along the way.

While literature sets its focus clearly on the therapeutic and rehabilitative potential for the physically or mentally disabled, youth with behavioural issues, and seniors, there is little research focusing on the benefits for healthy young people, unless in a more formal educational setting such as farm schools. Research about farming activities in traditional outdoor education programmes for children and

young adults are absent to the point of nonexistence. It is in this, that a research gap appears since the hugely positive effect that working, learning and developing in a simplistic outdoors setting can provide for anyone may be missed.

This leads into the research question of this thesis: the exploration of the benefits of farming activities and a simplistic lifestyle as part of an outdoor education programme to young people.

Outdoor education programmes are a powerful tool to reconnect a generation of young people with nature, steering them away from their technology- dominated lives towards more sensuous experiential activities in a natural environment. The research findings may indicate whether purposeful activities, such as farming, deserve greater recognition for their potential in the world of outdoor education, despite the lack of focus on adrenaline rushes and excitement.

Guiding questions that will shape the study are:

- Do participants personally gain anything from the purposeful activities conducted at the farm? As will be further outlined in the following chapter, it is crucial to put expectations aside and keep an open mind when conducting research, as predetermined thinking may negatively impact the outcome of the study. Therefore, the possibility that participants receive no benefit from the farming activities must be taken into account.
- If so, in what way do they perceive these activities to be beneficial? The literature analysed above clearly indicates the primary areas of benefit to be of physical, psychological and social nature. It will be insightful to see whether the young people's perspective in this study highlights comparable benefits.
- How do these activities compare to more adrenaline driven activities? The wide-spread commonality of adrenaline driven activities in outdoor education suggests that there are benefits to be gained from it. While the studied setting has its focus on purposeful activities on the farm, it also offers abseiling and rafting. Therefore, the effects of both can be analysed comparatively.

### **3. Methodology**

All research methods have their strengths and shortcomings and are variously suited to different research questions (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). Hence, the choice of method requires careful evaluation. Quantitative research is primarily used to prove existing theories and make statistical claims, whilst a qualitative approach aims to be more detailed and rich, dealing mainly with complex data in the form of words, pictures or objects, serving to discover and develop new empirically proven theories. Furthermore, not all you want to research is quantitatively measurable. In the case of this thesis research, where the content is very subjective, involving personal opinions and feelings, quantitative measures alone would likely fail to establish a satisfactory overview (O'Hara, Wainwright & Kay, 2011). Hence the methodologies chosen for this study are of a qualitative nature.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Research**

As Flick, Von Kardorff and Steinke (2000) state, the range of methodologies available depending on the research setting and question is what makes qualitative research stand out. Only by considering the research question in regard to the setting can the researcher make sure to encompass all facets of the research and not to miss out on knowledge. Moreover, qualitative research is more suitable to the participants' everyday life (Flick, 2007). In this study all research was undertaken in an outdoor education programme that participants took part in. Whilst it is not an everyday setting for them, it is one that they chose to participate in regardless of the study, and not a constructed reality simply for the purpose of research.

Flick et al. (2000) emphasise that qualitative research must be contextualised. In the case of this research all statements by participants have to be seen in the context of the whole programme and the individual's background, behaviour and attitude. It is about reconstructing and understanding a different perspective rather than isolating statements and interpreting meaning. Creating depth within the

study aligns with the phenomenological approach, which will be explained in the next part of this chapter.

## **3.2 A Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenology strives to explore the meaning of the lived experience from the participants' perspective with an emphasis on the personal and subjective (Groenewald, 2004; O'Hara et al., 2011) and was therefore fitting for this research question. The collected data stems from participants first hand experience of the phenomenon. The researcher is expected to stay true to the participants' voice, casting assumptions, previous knowledge and expectations aside. The aim is to "describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible, as if seeing it for the first time" (O'Hara et al., 2011, p. 93). O'Hara et al. (2011) mention gaining participants' trust as important when undertaking this type of research. Since the focus is on depth rather than structure, researchers rely on participants sharing their opinions and experiences openly and honestly. However, at the same time the researcher must remain cautious so as to not influence the outcome in any way. Different kinds of data can be used with this approach, such as interviews, observations and personal texts (Sanger, 1996). The following sections will outline the quality criteria required and define them with regards to the chosen qualitative research methods.

### **3.2.1 Quality criteria**

Groenewald (2004) believes that the phenomenological approach which was undertaken in this study is the most beneficial way to receive data that is both valid and reliable. Validity and reliability are essential components to any research, and relate to the truthfulness and accuracy of the results. A reliable study will provide similar findings on a regular basis, and a valid study will provide results that are not skewed by an anomalous source. However, critical voices such as Sanger (1996) emphasise that research involving people will never be the same when repeated, thus reliability remains an issue. "People being people, are not very reliable as subjects of attempts to achieve validity. [...] Individuals and

groups are as unique in their entirety as the finger prints they individually own” (Sanger, 1996, p. 40/41).

Morse et al. (2002) acknowledge that several factors may affect the research outcome. They outline four criteria that should be met to ensure a valid and reliable study, suggestions that are supported by findings in Groenewald (2004) and Brink (1993).

First, as stated in Brink (1993), Morse et al. (2002) and Groenewald (2004), the researchers themselves are the primary risk to valid and reliable study results. Brink (1993, p. 36) emphasises that the “truth of responses is a key concern when data are obtained through questionnaires and interviews”. The participants may be biased by the researchers’ way of thinking or their response to answers. Likewise Mouton and Marais (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 7) state that researchers “hold explicit beliefs” and cannot be detached from their presumptions, and therefore cannot reliably obtain data without influencing their participants. While these issues cannot be completely resolved measures have been undertaken to minimise their effects, as outlined in the following sections. As proven in Brink (1993), comparing the results obtained with other evidence, such as the observations used in this study, provides the ideal foundation for validity and reliability. Another option is utilising a second researcher to ensure the results are being analysed truthfully, and not being skewed to suit the overarching theme of the research.

Second, the sample of participants should be suitable and consist of people who possess sufficient knowledge of the topic being researched (Morse et al., 2002). In the case of this study all young people participating in the programme were considered to be appropriate and were all invited to participate. After asking for informed consent, data was received from a range of participants across the group, so as to ensure a valid cross section of results. Ideally, a second group would have been included in the research, however, unfortunately this was not possible.

Third, “collecting and analysing data concurrently forms a mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). The resultant data was analysed in the initial process shortly after the programme was run, therefore providing accuracy and truthfulness to the dissected data.

The fourth aspect refers to theoretical thinking in data analysis. Whenever ideas emerge based on the data, the researcher has to reconfirm that these ideas can indeed be verified in the collected data. Morse et al. (2002) state that “thinking theoretically requires macro-micro perspectives” where the researcher must focus on the small comments that may provide critical information and developing ideas whilst keeping in mind what the respondent is actually trying to say. It is an “inching forward without making cognitive leaps” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). The data has been critically analysed according to phenomenological research guidelines outlined in chapter 3.2.3 to ensure a study which is truthful and accurate.

### **3.2.2 Diaries**

Originally, interviews were to be used in order to understand the participants’ perspectives on the ten day programmes at Mittagundi. However, after careful consideration, diaries were found to be a more appropriate way of gaining insight into the young people’s perspectives in this particular study. The decision was heavily influenced by Mittagundi’s basic principles of living a simple lifestyle. As a traditional pioneer-style farm Mittagundi operates without electricity and all participants hand in their personal technological devices at the beginning of the programme. Therefore, the use of any technical device in order to capture audio or video material seemed inappropriate. The other option, to simultaneously ask questions and write down the responses with pen and paper was perceived too great a challenge in a foreign language.

More importantly, however, diaries provided a less disruptive way of data collection. Instead of being asked to separate from the group for an interview, partici-

pants could write in their diaries whenever they had the urge, or the time during the programme. Whilst interviews enable the researcher to ask specific questions, they might subconsciously direct the participants' train of thought in doing so. In this case, a conscious decision was made against asking for specific information from the young people who were writing the diaries, the idea being that they will be able to focus on whatever was important to them. Therefore, it is assumed to be a source of data in itself whether certain aspects, such as the farming activities, get mentioned or not.

In line with the decision not to ask specific questions, a further decision was made against designating a writing time each day. This too would have been a disruption to the programme and directed the young peoples' notes to a certain extent, forcing them to write something that they might otherwise not have mentioned. The diaries are meant to be a memory for the young people as much as a research source for this thesis, and should simply and accurately reflect their personal thoughts and feelings. The risk in this approach was that some participants might not write much or not at all, which happened with several participants. Fortunately, there were enough participants who wrote their diaries with dedication.

Regarding the sample, all participants of the programme were invited to participate in the research. The research is registered with NSD, the Data Protection Official for Research and has received ethical clearance. In order to comply with ethical guidelines, informed consent was asked from the parents of the young people before conducting the research. Further, it was the participants' decision whether to write the diaries and again whether to hand them in at the end of the programme. The choice to opt out of the research should they prefer to do so was pointed out to them at different points during the ten days and a substantial amount of diaries were indeed not handed in at the end. Of the 15 diaries that were originally handed out at the beginning of the programme, approximately half were of value in terms of research.

### **3.2.3 Observations**

Participant observations allow the researcher to acquire an in-depth insight into the research setting and enable them to gain the participants' trust in order to make them feel comfortable in sharing their views (O'Hara et al., 2011). Patton (2002, as cited in Corbin and Strauss 2015, p. 41) classifies it as "creative fieldwork" and describes it as "using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening". However, it is crucial to be aware that this 'using every part of oneself' makes it impossible not to have a certain impact on the research situation. While the researcher should still be careful not to influence the outcome, Sanger (1996, p. 4) warns that "invisibility is more fantasy than reality for the observer. We can minimise our effect but it would be foolish to claim that we have no effect at all".

In this study ten days were spent with the group of participants, living and working together from morning until evening. It was an overt observation, with the participants aware of the research. Written information was sent out to them by email before the programme, and a personal introduction and explanation followed at the beginning of the ten days. While undertaking covert research is often justified by arguing that participants might not act naturally with a researcher present (Sanger, 1996), this seemed unlikely to pose a problem in an outdoor setting where the ten days are spent together doing activities in a group. Indeed, the young people did not seem to see the observer but the person instead, and the research was seldom a topic in daily conversations.

According to Best (2014), the researcher will always be caught between the role of observer, who tries to record the reality of a situation objectively, and the role of participant, who plays a certain role in the activities and the observed outcomes. While it is important to accept this, there are strategies to minimise the observer's impact on the research outcome and achieve a more open state of mind. Sanger (1996) suggests to be aware of any preconceptions that exist with regards to the research beforehand. The aim when going into the field is to not preselect



data in line with what the researcher expects, but to record everything that happens as accurately and detailed as possible in the field notes. Any outcome has to be expected and thus notes have to reflect the reality as closely as possible.

Whilst writing field notes daily is essential, especially when the research stretches over several days, taking comprehensive notes after a long day of farm work and activities was a taxing process and required a certain amount of self-discipline. Silverman (2013) suggest four separate sets of notes: one for note-taking at the time, another for an expanded version after each field session, a third for ideas and problems and a fourth for provisional analysis. While this sounds like a great idea in theory, it proved unfeasible in practice. In the case of this research undertaken outside, pen and paper were carried all day. This enabled brief note-taking in one journal, utilised for writing down participants' statements. These notes were complemented by more detailed descriptions in a second journal at the end of the day. In accordance with Sanger's (1996) suggestion, personal insights or explanations were noted separately from the factual accounts, however, they were still kept in the same notebook.

### **3.2.4 Data analysis approach**

“Good research is not generated by rigorous data alone...[but] ‘going beyond’ the data to develop ideas” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 21). In order to do so, while still staying true to the participants' voices, the data has to be analysed thoroughly, a lengthy process that requires reading through the data again and again. O'Hara et al. (2011, p. 213) describe this kind of analysis as a “balance between a straightforward description of the data and over-conceptualising the data through higher levels of interpretation”.

Following the suggestions for phenomenological data analysis, the diary data was carefully read through, in order to establish sections where participants express their thoughts and views regarding their experiences. All parts that identified significant benefits were colour-coded and labelled. The themes were then col-

lected in a list (see Appendix VIII). This procedure was repeated with the other diaries, adding to the list of themes whenever something new came to attention or rewording them when necessary. As more sources of data were included, more difficulties with some of the sub-themes emerged. In some cases the question arose as to whether or not two sub-themes were needed or whether they were virtually the same thing. A provisional decision was made with a side-note reminder to revise this specifically. After all the diaries had been read through, the themes on the list were sorted into themes and sub-themes.

With the list of thematic groups and sub-themes complete, the diaries were read a second time and the identified themes were applied to the data. Again, certain adaptations took place. For example the sub-theme called ‘simple life’ under the thematic group of ‘simplicity’ was more appropriately defined as ‘reflection on convenience’. The ‘environmental’ theme saw an addition of the sub-theme ‘expectation versus reality’. Under ‘purposeful activities’ two changes took place, with ‘enjoyment’ being considered too broad and all-encompassing, and ‘achievement’ being moved to the ‘physical’ thematic group because it appeared mostly in connection with physical aspects. After it was mentioned several times, the sub-theme ‘inspiration’ was added to the ‘social’ thematic group. At times it was necessary to look at the context of a remark in order to decide where it should be best put. Very tricky cases were discussed with an objective outsider, who did not have any in-depth knowledge of the research.

A table with all thematic groups and sub-themes was then created (see Appendix IX). The diaries were now read through again and all the labelled sections were recorded in the corresponding part of the table, with a reference of where to find it in the original text. Gaps were left where nothing was observed. This was done for each participant, and again some changes were made. The ‘social’ thematic group saw changes when the sub-theme of ‘team work’ was found to be too closely related to ‘support’ and the two sub-themes were merged under the latter heading.

Finally, the findings were summarised. In order to not stray too far from participants' voices, the focus was on the diaries. Diary entries were compared to each other in order to establish relevance of a benefit. Where possible and applicable, information from the observation field notes (see Appendix X) were added. Sub-themes that only very few participants had commented on were taken out of the summary of results due to insignificance. In order to increase comprehension, the thematic group of 'attitudes' was partly split up and inserted into other themes.

## **4. Empirical study**

Now that the theoretical background and the methodology have been outlined, the following section will focus on the empirical study that was undertaken at Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre in Victoria, Australia. To ensure a thorough understanding of the research findings and enable readers to put them in context, the research setting will be explained in more detail. The research findings will then be presented and made transparent and comprehensible by underlining them with data excerpts. To conclude, the findings will be discussed.

### **4.1 Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre**

Founded in 1978 by Ian Stapleton, Mittagundi is a pioneer-style working farm where young people from different backgrounds can return to a simplistic lifestyle and engage in purposeful activities in a remote outdoor setting (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016). It is a not-for-profit organisation with staff working on a volunteer basis and money is raised through fundraising events (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016; Neill, 2002). The buildings have been constructed and maintained by student groups (Stapleton, 1988; Neill, 2002) and many of the original buildings are still being used today.

What sets itself apart from other farms is that there are neither clocks nor timetables at Mittagundi, and no amenities such as electricity or warm running water. Stapleton (1988, p. vii) describes it as

“a remote, semi self-supporting ‘pioneer-type’ farm and bush settlement. A place in which young people from all backgrounds could work together to build, maintain and operate. And a place where they could experience in the process, an uncomplicated lifestyle, involving challenge, purpose and achievement. Also a far closer contact with the natural side of life, and the environment that supports it. And all in an atmosphere where the complications of competition, consumerism and materialism were temporarily removed, and the values of co-operation, reflection and people, were re-emphasised”.

The activities undertaken at Mittagundi show many similarities and characteristics to those described in the literature of Green Care farms. Students go on ten day programs away from their technology-driven lives and into the mountains; these consist of a three-day hike, four days of farm work and adventurous activities (abseiling and rafting or water sledding), and a three-day hike back out of the mountains. At Mittagundi all farm activities have a purpose. Students may partake in the harvesting of fruit and vegetables, making jam, milking the cows, chopping wood for hot showers and cooking, learning woodwork skills in the joinery such as making spoons, bowls and jewellery, or clearing vegetation in the animal paddocks (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016). The focus is on “simple rural living” (Neill, 2002, p.3). The farming activities undertaken depend on the season, and on what needs to be done, making them ‘real’ tasks, rather than created purely to keep the participants busy. Furthermore, young people get to experience a sustainable, and to a certain extent self-sufficient, way of life during their stay at the farm. For example, the saw dust used for the composting toilets is a product of the work done at the joinery, meat is consumed only twice a week and stems from the farm’s own steers, the horse manure is utilised in the vegetable garden and orchard to improve plant growth, and everybody is given the chance to milk the cow before breakfast in the morning.

Thus, young people will hopefully gain a deeper understanding of the local resources and food production. While working in nature, they learn how to take care of the environment and use scarce resources wisely. They may also reflect on their lifestyle at home and the waste of resources that takes place in daily life (Stapleton, 1988).

On farms in remote areas such as Mittagundi in the Glen Valley, being part of the community is an essential component of survival for the inhabitants. From the very beginning, Ian Stapleton intended to put the emphasis at Mittagundi on people and building a strong community. In his previous jobs he encountered many children whose ‘poverty’ had nothing to do with money but was rather “caused by

a lifestyle dominated by an endless desire for more of it” (Stapleton, 1988, p. 125). He hoped that a place like Mittagundi could show young people that sharing your life and the material possessions with those around you is worth far more than striving for excess material success, and therefore never be content with what you have (Stapleton, 1988). There is a strong focus on the farm community and respectful, appreciative social interaction. Unfortunately, society today often implies that you need certain gadgets in order to be someone, and adolescents are especially vulnerable in this stage of life. This often leads to feelings of immense pressure to be someone they are not. Mittagundi aims to respect the young people for who they are whilst providing time and space for them to find out what they want to with their adult life (Stapleton, 1988; Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016).

However, from an early stage Stapleton also acknowledged the limits that a place like Mittagundi has. Firstly, places like Mittagundi compete with beaches, more adventurous activities, and trips to famous places such as Ayers Rock, and are therefore not equally as popular with everyone. It sounds “just too much like hard work to a lot of kids” (Stapleton, 1988, p. 97). Secondly, Mittagundi is not the right place for all types of people. It has the potential to be beneficial for many of them but there are also some that it is not helpful for (Stapleton 1988; Neill, 2002). The principle was that “the kids must know what they are in for, and how it might be able to help them, and still want to come. If they have to be coned into coming, then the mountains are not the right place for them” (Stapleton, 1988, p. 97). The latter is also important since the students attending are expected to be involved in every aspect of living in such a natural setting, and thus be prepared to do their share both during the hard, and the good times (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016; Neill, 2002).

The participants at Mittagundi programmes come from various backgrounds. Being an officially valued provider of outdoor education, the state of Victoria allows young people to take part in Mittagundi programmes during school weeks.

Generally, Mittagundi aims to provide for all youths, not specifically for those at risk, or in some way mentally or physically impaired, even though such participants are welcome, too. However, the policy is not to take more than six people from the same school on one programme in order to avoid cliques from forming and enhance social interaction. In fact, it is nominated on the website that participants ideally come on their own, in order to truly be themselves without submitting to pre-existing peer expectations (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016). Those who arrive together are usually split into different groups upon arrival at the farm, meaning they do not see each other on farm days from morning until late afternoon.

Reflection is also an important part of the Mittagundi programme. After five days the whole group meets for the ‘halfway-chat’, a reflection of the first few days, an assessment of how the group is going as a team, and the setting of personal, and group goals for the next five days. Another reflection takes place on the final day of the programme around the campfire on the hike out. The discussion then focusses on personal highlights of the programme, whether the set goals were achieved, personal values and what participants take home from the time spent at Mittagundi (Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, 2016; observation).

## **4.2 Research findings**

The young people whose diaries were analysed in order to explore the benefits gained from the purposeful activities and the simplistic lifestyle on the farm are all girls between 14 and 16 years of age from various backgrounds.

### **4.2.1 The benefits of purposeful activities**

What sets purposeful activities apart from other learning opportunities is the combination of acquiring new skills and knowledge, with a sense of contribution. Gaining new skills and knowledge is one of the key areas that participants mention as beneficial in their diaries, in addition to feeling a sense of achievement, in connection with their work on the farm. Farm days at Mittagundi consist of vari-

ous activities, depending on what work needs to be done. The aim is for participants to have an opportunity to try various things. Staff ensure that an explanation is given for how and why tasks are undertaken.

Wood work was mentioned positively by most respondents. There were opportunities to do work in the joinery, and to help with the construction of the new Winter Hut, a bush hut currently being built for housing during the winter programmes. It is a unique opportunity, given that the original two cabins which were built approximately thirty years ago, still house young people on programmes today. Participant C wrote that she “had a lot of fun chiselling and putting up the veranda” when helping with the construction of the Winter Hut. Participant B noted the construction work as an “amazing experience to know you had a part in creating and leaving a positive mark on Mittagundi”. In the joinery participants had the opportunity to produce something new, like a necklace, spoon or ladle, or to fix a tool used on the farm. New products are sold at festivals or other fundraising events to support the farm, however, the young person who created the product could purchase it cheaply at the end of the programme if they wished to do so (observation). Almost all participants made a necklace in the joinery. Participant E described: “I made a pretty necklace that I worked really hard on. I was rather proud of it”. As one of few, Participant B reported making a spoon “which didn’t look much like a spoon but [I] was still proud”. Participant D further mentioned her interest in “learning how everything works in the joinery” and writes that she “loved fixing the wood splitter”. Observations further added to this impression and found that everybody was working hard and the atmosphere was extremely relaxed (field notes).

The forge was another area for young people to learn new skills, whilst producing necessary farm items such as coat hooks or fire tool sets. During this programme, many respondents had the chance to create coat hooks for the new Winter Hut. Participant G described the process in detail: “It was great, we melted metal and banged it into shape. Then got the metal really hot once more and twist-



ed the metal”. She continued to say that she “loved trying new and different things”. Participant C said she “enjoyed working in the forge, all of these new learning experiences”. Likewise, Participant D mentioned learning “what goes on in the forge and how everything works”. Participant F summarised that “it’s great being able to contribute to the hut because I really feel like I’m able to contribute to Mittagundi that way”.

The farm garden clearly served as a good arena for learning, too. In the vegetable garden, Participant A gained new knowledge about soil types and qualities, and the positive effect of dung beetles on soil, “which was really interesting”. Putting previously collected cow manure on the vegetable plants provided a direct insight in the value of that task. She perceived the task of collecting cow manure as “hard work but satisfying” and continued that it was “good to see how it was helping the vegetables”. Participants C and D also noted that they learnt a lot in the garden, with Participant D exclaiming that she enjoyed “working hard, planting veggies that would one day feed future young people at Mittagundi”. Clearly impressed with the skills that she learnt, Participant U mentioned teaching her mother how to grow garlic as one of the things that she will carry forward into ‘city life’ (field notes). Another task during the programme was erecting a garden fence to protect the vegetables from the cows. Participant A described it as “very difficult and tiring work”. However, both herself and Participant D felt that they were contributing to the farm by helping with the fencing. Both mentioned that it felt great, while Participant G described the opportunity to contribute through farm work in general as “a privilege”. One girl had the opportunity to compare her expectation with reality when shovelling horse manure for the vegetable garden, an activity that was observed to be the least favourite to begin with. Participant B wrote: “Surprisingly this wasn’t bad at all as it didn’t stink or stick to your shoes”, and concluded in personal conversation that “this was actually fun”. While planting lettuce, Participant G suddenly said aloud: “Such a peaceful activity, gardening”. The young people were observed to work hard, however, a few of them gave up on physically more challenging tasks, such as digging, after a while.

The majority of the group awoke early at least once during the days on the farm to milk the cow. The excitement for it became apparent in some of the diaries, with Participant G writing that she “can’t wait for tomorrow, a new day and I’m milking the cow!”. Participant A described milking as a “weird experience but also cool”. Once the milk was in the bucket, the young people helped to carry it to the kitchen where it was sterilised and filled into bottles. Every morning there was fresh milk with the porridge. This provided the participants with the chance to interact with the animal, to learn new skills, and provide insight into how milk is actually produced.

However, everyday tasks such as cooking and wood chopping provided opportunities to contribute and learn as well. Following an afternoon in the kitchen, Participant C wrote: “I want to make all my oven meals at home now, all of everything here is so simple”. There was a great sense of appreciation for the food that different groups prepared for the others every day, with respondents taking pride in their own creations. Participant E, for example, wrote that her group “made baked potatoes and everyone said they were delicious!”. The task of chopping wood, which is necessary for cooking, heating water, and keeping warm, provided a physical challenge for some. Participant B remarked that “cutting wood is harder than people think”, while Participant A suggested that it was “challenging but fun”. However, it made Participant A feel “good to know you’re helping people by cutting that wood”. Participant D wrote about returning from abseiling in the afternoon and getting “straight into woodchopping, it was really hard but good to get into, hearing the split of the wood was super satisfying”.

The purposeful characteristics of the farming tasks encouraged everybody to do their part, without a leader telling them to do so. It was made clear from the start that everybody’s help was needed and appreciated. One girl summarised her impression as follows: “We have to take responsibility for our own actions. Nobody tells you that you have to do something. If you don’t do the task it’s just not

getting done” (field notes). The great variety of the tasks worked to everyone’s advantage in that respect. With so many varying opportunities every participant found something that challenged them, interested them, or provided new learning experiences.

#### **4.2.2 Benefits gained from the simplistic lifestyle**

The simplistic lifestyle at Mittagundi possibly made the greatest impression on the young people. It is a way of life that they do not usually lead. Many perceived it to be a very valuable experience and it awakened a new sense of appreciation, with Participant C writing that “Mittagundi is making me realise all the things we take for granted”. Accordingly, all diaries show examples of a reflection on conveniences. Participant B takes note of how her cabin group “started to reflect on things in life we take for granted, such as flushing toilets, comfy beds, showers, warm meals and being warm and comfy in the clothes we wear” on the first evening at the farm. Because water is an extremely valuable resource, requiring large quantities of wood to be heated, the participants get to shower only twice, upon arrival after the hike in and on the sledding day. Therefore, several respondents appreciate the showers especially, with Participant A exclaiming relief in her diary at “FINALLY getting a hot shower” and Participant E experiencing the warm shower as “very luxurious”. At the same time Participant C spoke of “slightly cold showers” after the sledding day, but seemed not to mind and simply noted that the water was not as warm as it could have been. After two nights in tents on the hike, most appreciated having a “comfortable”, “proper bed” (Participants C and G). A conversation with Participant B about the cabins resulted in her saying: “It’s dark. And cosy. [Pause] As in there are beds and mattresses, so we take it. After the last two nights, you know”, followed by laughter (field notes).

Another key concept was the handing in of all modern day items. It was done soon after pick-up, and included not only technological devices but also books. Leader C explained that some participants prefer to read, and do not integrate themselves into the group. The book is then a distraction and counteractive to the

development of a community feeling (field notes). Participant D wrote that handling in her modern day items was “a main part of the day” for her and described that “we left them all behind, ready for a big challenge”. For Participant G this moment marked the time that “our journey truly began”. She wrote: “With no electricity, or modern devices we are living a simple, honest, happy life and I am really loving it. It makes you enjoy making your food or using ash for the toilet”. However, it was not only the everyday tasks that were done differently. Participant D talks about the joinery: “I found it really interesting seeing how things like the drill worked without electricity. Everything was done by hand” and Participant C observed that “things mean so much more in the end when you have to put time and effort in”.

Yet, not everyone was in favour of all aspects of the simple approach and responses varied. Participant B wrote about the lack of flushing toilets as negative and observed that “it added to the experience of Mittagundi but wasn’t that pleasant”. In addition, Participant E was quite frustrated at the fact that “just before we got to Mittagundi we passed a road, which really annoyed me because we had to walk 20 km over the past 2 days but we could have just drove”.

The experience of living without clocks and not knowing the time was another concept appreciated by most participants. Participant A described it as “weird [...] but it really helps you just live in the moment”, whilst Participant G stated that she loved it for the same reason. Participant D wrote that “once again we woke with the sun, how beautiful” and went on to question “who needs time?”. Several respondents’ diaries mentioned guessing what time it was when they woke up. One girl was observed to exclaim proudly in conversation that she realised they get woken up later at the farm than on the hike, because it was already light outside. It was further observed that the group quickly succumbed to the natural rhythm of getting up with daylight and growing tired after dark. The girls went to bed soon after dinner on most nights, tired from a full day’s work. However, it was not easy for everyone to get used to it. Participant E mentioned the absence of

clocks as a negative, writing that not knowing the time she awoke “because we don’t have any watches, which I have to admit, I don’t like”. Furthermore, the lack of clocks proved to be a challenge in the kitchen. With no timer, and only a wood-fired stove, much checking was required to ensure the food did not burn.

Two participants mentioned the benefits of a stress free environment on the farm in their diaries. Participant C’s diary entry stated: “I love the simple life, this life is making me so at peace and down to earth, I feel like I belong in nature and [...] enjoy being away from everything, literally leaving your troubles behind”. Another young girl described the farm as a place “like another world [...], so peaceful and stress free even though there is work to do” (Participant A). Observations during the ‘half-way chat’ after five days on the programme, showed that most girls shared this view. One girl said: “At home you are so wrapped up in school and everything. Here you can unwind” and Participant E called the programme an “emotional detox”.

In reflection at the end of the programme Participant A wrote: “I have learnt how to be happy without all the extra things like technology in your life, [...] how to live life in the simplest way and still feel amazingly happy”. Participant C claimed that “after being here for a few days I realise that things, all things, are better when they’re simpler” and Participant G wrote that “living a SIMPLE, HAPPY and HONEST life is definitely such an important message Mittagundi has taught me”.

Observations attested to the simplistic farm environment working its magic in terms of keeping everyone busy during the day and pleasantly tired at night. Without the abstract notion of ‘time’ to dictate the daily rhythm everybody went to bed when they felt tired, often directly after cleaning up dinner. Those who were not sleepy yet had the option to sit around the fire and converse, or make music.

### **4.2.3 Benefits deriving from the environment**

The diaries clearly portray that the most appreciation for nature occurred on the hikes in and out. The participants overwhelmingly mentioned the views, filling their bottles with fresh creek water, doing ‘Emu-bobs’ (food scraps and litter collection) after lunches to make sure that no trace of human impact was left in the environment, and the cold mornings, which froze the water in the drink bottles and made it difficult to move.

Nevertheless, the time spent in nature conducting farming activities and the simplistic lifestyle at the farm also fostered certain benefits. Since its founding days Mittagundi aimed to use as few resources as possible (Stapleton, 1988) and the participants soon found themselves in tune with this guideline. Participant C did not worry about the few designated showers, and simply looked forward to drenching her hair in the river because “the river will clean it somewhat”. Participant D was impressed by the ‘no waste’ policy regarding food. She wrote about the day when they “picked dry basil and put it in jars, it was great to see how sustainable the farm was”. Participant C also mentioned that “the garden and self-sustainable foods and water and cooking and heating mechanisms is all really cool”, referring to the fact that as many materials and products as possible are produced on the farm. Participant G stated: “Living sustainably was one of the amazing parts of Mittagundi that I really enjoyed. Using ash for the toilet from the fire, and eating meat from the farm”. Indeed, the sawdust for the composting toilets came from the joinery, but the young girl was right that the little meat that is consumed at Mittagundi is from their own steers. Moreover, vegetables are used from the garden, and the farm’s own wood is used to heat the fires for showers and cooking.

A newfound attention to nature, with all its advantages and disadvantages, could also be noted as an effect of the simplistic lifestyle. Participant C wrote in her diary about a discovery that she made going to the outside toilet in the night: “The stars and milky way were so much brighter than at my house”. On a differ-

ent occasion, she also noted that there were no kangaroos that morning “but there were a lot yesterday”. Participant G found unexpected views a treat, reporting that “the showers were really cool, looking out to the incredible bush”. On a different note, Participant B complained about an unexpected wake-up call in the middle of the night: “Today I was awoken by an annoying rooster who didn’t know the difference between the moon and the sun” and Participant L joked that dinner was ready when she found a large Witchetty Grub in a piece of wood, carrying it around to show everyone.

Clearly, the lifestyle at Mittagundi provided the young people with a different and closer contact to the natural environment, opening their eyes to unexpected beauty and introducing them to achievable ways of protecting it.

#### **4.2.4 Social benefits**

Through interactions with others during the farm work, meal times, daily chores, and other activities, social benefits can be considered a positive, inevitable by-product, arising naturally and without the need for constructed social bonding exercises.

Accordingly, a large section in each diary is dedicated to describing the daily interactions with others. Primarily, the benefits lie within the enjoyment of each other’s company, as is mentioned several times. Respondents described the other girls and leaders as “kind, lovely, positive, caring” people. Interestingly, daily chores such as doing the dishes and working in the kitchen preparing meals were emphasised as opportunities for conversations, and having a good time together. Observations found the girls excitedly swapping stories about their days and jobs during meal times. As Participant D observed in her diary, “dishwashing is actually a great part of the day, singing and laughing is so much fun”. Other activities that are highlighted as valuable interactions include knitting (Participant E), making music, and singing around the fire in the evenings (Participants D and E). As the only warm place apart from bed, the fire was a gathering point in the evenings.

Its gentle glow invited people to quietly share stories and songs before settling down for the night.

The activities of abseiling and hiking were also mentioned as valuable social interactions with peers, and leaders. Whilst hiking left ample opportunity for pleasant conversations, the waiting times at abseiling also offered many such chances. Participant D, for example, stated that she “got to know the people in my group a lot better” at abseiling. This may be due to the fact that abseiling is a challenging activity for many and when nervous and in need for support some were inclined to open up more. Participant G wrote that “Leader A and I had some really great conversations about [...] technology which was really interesting”, showing that not only the conversation itself but also the topics were meaningful.

Despite arriving mostly on their own, or being separated from their friends upon arrival at the farm, most respondents wrote about the new friends they made. Certainly the challenges of the simple lifestyle, and being away from home in a remote farm setting makes people bond quickly. There are challenges to overcome and team work is an important aspect of daily life at the farm. Participant C felt that she was “really connecting with some of the people here” and Participant F stated that “all the girls are becoming so close, it doesn’t feel like we met only four days ago”. Most expressed their regret upon leaving people behind at the end of the programme.

Many young girls developed a connection to Mittagundi that went beyond mere enjoyment. It was a sense of belonging, expressed by some through the plans to return at a later date “on a follow-up programme or as a volunteer” (Participant D). That this is possible was demonstrated by three of the six staff members, all of whom had been to Mittagundi programmes as young people. This sense of belonging was further fostered through the half-way chat after five days of the programme, as shown by Participant D: “It was a super special time sitting around the fire and the support and respect in our group was incredible”. Other



young people also turned to their diaries to reflect upon the time spent at the farm and the connection they feel to place and people. “I began to really feel how much I love Mittagundi and the simple, happy, honest way of living” wrote Participant G, while Participant A knew she will “miss my second family I have made at Mittagundi” at the end of the ten days.

Experiencing support was another social benefit that came up in the data repeatedly. However, it is noteworthy that this was overwhelmingly mentioned in relation to abseiling, sledding and hiking. Clearly, these activities are more mentally and/or physically challenging and an increased level of support might be needed. Aside from these activities Participant F mentioned that “everyone was really there for me when I needed it” during a bout of homesickness, Participant D spoke of support from a leader while working in the joinery, enabling her to finish a piece of work, and Participant G referred to people generally being “continuously amazing, supportive and friendly”.

Less significant in the data but mentioned in two diaries was the inspirational benefit. Participant A took inspiration from the leaders whom she describes as “lovely and inspiring people who are amazing to be around”, while Participant D referred to the music making which awakened a wish “to learn the guitar now”.

#### **4.2.5 Peer review and self-reflection**

The data analysis brought unexpected results that showed that living and working together during the programme triggered a varying degree of self-reflection in the participants.

Firstly, being in a group that primarily consisted of strangers, a certain review of the peer’s behaviour took place. Participant C mentioned the differences in people’s personalities very early on in her diary. Observations also noted an interesting situation when packing for the hike on the first day, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

“Big differences in attitudes become apparent when a discussion erupts about how much make-up to take on the hike and whether or not deodorant is a necessity. Some girls really take the (male) leader’s opinion into account and take only toothbrush and toothpaste for the two days (Participant G, Participant D, Participant B) while others claim that they cannot live without make-up (Participant L)” (field notes).

Similar situations were observed when it came to eating porridge for breakfast. Many girls did not like it, and two blatantly refused to eat it. While some programme participants attempted to encourage them, others were more critical in their assessment. Participant E wrote in her diary that “it was still annoying when people refused to eat breakfast” and Participant C phrased it harshly in stating that “people need to respect what they are given”. She criticised the other girls several times in her diary for not appreciating the food, the effort that went into cooking, and for refusing to try new things.

However, the assessment of other people’s behaviour led to a critical self-reflection in some. After disapproving of other’s alleged lack of respect, Participant C wrote about herself: “even though I already appreciate a lot of things I am so glad for simple things”, obviously reevaluating her own attitude after arriving at the farm. After a three days she wrote about others opening up and becoming “themselves more”. Again, she looked at herself in relation to others and reflected that she “can even feel myself relaxing and I just notice how I am not as reserved as before”. An important factor in fostering self-reflection was the ‘half-way chat’, after five days on the farm. It took place around the fire after dinner and the atmosphere was calm but serious. The participants were talked through the events of the past few days in the form of a phantasy journey. Afterwards everyone was invited to share what they took out of Mittagundi so far and set personal, and group goals for the remaining time. Some remarkable statements were written down in the field notes as follows.

The values of Mittagundi, respect, fairness and safety, were brought up by Participant D who said that they “connect you to the other people, the environment and to yourself”. Another girl added that Mittagundi “makes values more than words”, in that the values are lived on the farm rather than merely talked about. Generally, many girls commented that they felt as if they have known people for much longer and that they felt comfortable sharing their feelings and opinions. Participant L expressed her feelings clearly: “At school you feel as if you’re wearing an emotional mask. When people here ask how you are it’s as if they really want the answer”. The girls also reflected on personal goals. Participant B stated during the half-way chat that she aimed at living life to the fullest. “Simple, honest and happy is what I’m getting out for myself”, Participant D said during the chat and wrote in her diary that night: “My goal by the end of Mittagundi is to take all the chances I get and expand my comfort zone”.

Opening up in front of a large group of people was not easy for everyone, yet it provided another reflective insight. Participant C expressed her discomfort in her diary that night and wrote that it was “weird for me because I don’t like to talk about emotions and things because I am not a very emotional person”. She found an interest in what the others said and, being a rather critical observer, deemed some of the statements to be “hypocritical”. This may be true to a certain extent when looking at Participant B’s diary entry that night which read: the half-way chat “basically told everyone we are the same and that we won’t judge each other”. Whether this statement was an accurate reflection of her beliefs, or whether she was simply too tired to write it down in more detail at the end of a long day remains unclear.

#### **4.2.6 Benefits of abseiling and water sledding**

The benefits of the more adrenaline-driven activities became very apparent in the research. Abseiling had a particularly great impact on the young people. As noted before, it was mentioned by participants with regard to providing opportunities to interact socially and also in connection to nature appreciation. Another ex-

tremely significant benefit, where it sets itself apart from the farming activities, is that it seemed to enable participants to step out of their comfort zones. Again, this assumption is made based on both the observations and the diaries.

The abseiling site was in a spectacular setting on a cliff overlooking the Mitta Mitta river. From the top of the abseiling spot it appeared as if you would have to abseil about 100 metres down to the river, but upon closer inspection from the bottom it became apparent that it was only approximately a thirty metre abseil onto a ledge. It was obvious as to why this might prove a challenge. Before the young people learnt how to put on the safety gear, Leader D talked about differences in comfort zones and respecting own boundaries and the boundaries of others. There was a clear focus on ‘challenge by choice’ (field notes). This clearly made an impression on the girls. Participant F wrote about the good support in the group and that everybody was able to support the others in “whatever their decision was, whether it was to do the abseiling or not to do it”. It was observed that everybody tried to encourage each other. One girl was so scared that she started to cry when putting on the harness. Nevertheless, she decided to give it a go. Participant G, whose turn would have been next, kindly stepped aside to let her go before she lost her courage. Indeed, the girl managed to abseil twice. An excerpt from the field notes states the following:

“Some [girls] really had to overcome their fear and it seemed to have a great effect on their self-confidence. [The girl who was so scared that she cried] for example seemed more confident. Being quite reluctant and shy throughout the first days, she seemed to chat to others more and even talk louder that night”.

Participant B was also very nervous. She told the group that completing the abseil was her goal for the time at Mittagundi. Again, the impressions gained through observations were reflected in the diaries. Participant B confirmed what she had said at the abseiling site when she wrote that evening: “My biggest goal coming to Mittagundi was conquering my fears and abseiling. I am proud to say that I achieved it not once but twice”. Participant A’s diary stated that she was “nervous

at first” and included others in assuming that it “pushed a lot of us out of our comfort zone” and Participant G basically agreed and wrote that she “was a bit nervous/anxious but I knew I was safe”.

After the abseiling there was a second talk about comfort zones and a little activity visualised that, no matter how participants originally felt about it, the second abseil was already easier for everyone than the first. It must be acknowledged that the impact that this activity had on the young people’s self-esteem appears unrivalled by the farming activities, at least in this group. Of great importance were the reflective discussions before and after the abseil.

The water sledding on the other hand was appreciated mainly for being fun and did not foster any deeper insights for the young people. Only the water temperature was mentioned in some diaries as demanding and Participants B and E even noted a numbness in the fingers from the cold water. The nature of the activity might have made a difference though. At the time of the research the water level of the river was too low and the originally scheduled activity of rafting had to be cancelled. Instead the young people went sledding and while there were a few challenging rapids, it was mainly just floating along or walking the sled along the particularly low parts.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The data analysis and comparison of diary entries with the observations clearly showed that healthy, young people do indeed benefit from farming activities and a simplistic lifestyle during outdoor education programmes. The following sections will establish to what extent the conducted research brought comparable results to the benefits outlined in literature, points in which it differed, and implications deriving from the results of this study.

### **4.3.1 Findings that correlate with the literature**

The data analysis led to slightly different thematic groups, resulting in a structure of benefits that deviates from the literature. Nevertheless many of the results correlate upon closer inspection and are thus comparable to previous studies, despite the obvious differences in duration, organisational aspects and target groups.

The strong ‘pull factor’, deriving from the purposeful characteristics of farming activities, that was mentioned by most reviewed authors as a significant psychological benefit (see chapter 2.3.2) was confirmed by participants in this study. Jobs need to be completed in order for the farm community to function, and this sole factor seemed to drive the young people to do their best. It evidently led to a feeling of achievement and satisfaction that derived from contributing to the farm, as was clearly visible throughout the participants’ diaries. The purposeful activities were directly connected to the acquisition of new skills in various fields of interest, which was also found to be of great value to participants in both previous research, and this study.

Overwhelmingly, the social benefits discovered in this study matched those mentioned in literature, especially with regards to support, opportunities to socialise and a sense of belonging. Without doubt, the latter is due to the strong focus on community ties at Mittagundi, not just with people on current programmes, but over decades. Being a not-for-profit organisation many things would not be possible without the help and kindness of others. The history of the many ways in which people have helped in the past was very present, and was conveyed to visitors in interesting tales. Every young person that attends a programme is considered a member of the Mittagundi community and invited back on a follow-up programme by a hand-written letter. This genuine appreciation towards those who share their time and effort with Mittagundi was noticeable from the first day and resulted in some young girls developing a very special sense of belonging to Mittagundi and its people.

In line with benefits mentioned in chapter 2.3.4, the simplistic and sustainable lifestyle at Mittagundi enabled participants to gain a new understanding of the interconnectedness of processes at the farm and the relationship with the natural environment. An appreciation for home-made food and pride in harvesting produce from the garden, or milking the cow was clearly observable. As suggested by Jolly and Krogh (2010) and van Elsen (2011), the personal work effort indeed was a key component.

### **4.3.2 Differences compared to the benefits found in literature**

An indicative difference has been discovered regarding the physical benefits. While the literature review found physical benefits to be substantial, it played only a minor role in the results from this study. Some participants acknowledged that certain tasks such as wood chopping and fencing were hard work, but only one girl mentioned an increase in physical strength, and not in relation to farming, but hiking. It can be argued that the physical benefits play such a vital role in the literature because the focus is on participants with psychological or physical problems, not on healthy young people as in the case of this research. Hence, the improvements may be more noticeable. Further, the majority of the reviewed studies had a longer programme duration. Ten days is not long enough to produce noticeable changes in strength or body awareness. The only congruency with the reviewed literature was an observed sense of physical fatigue at night after a day's work outside, resulting in participants retiring to bed very early and without being asked to do so.

The short time frame of the Mittagundi programmes also limited the chance to experience the results of participants' work efforts. While work in the joinery, or on the Winter Hut, erecting fence posts, and milking produced instantly observable results, outcomes from work conducted in the vegetable garden or orchard could only be seen after considerable time had passed. However, Mittagundi staff always pointed out that the vegetables harvested by the current group have been planted by previous groups, and that all tasks conducted during the programme

will likewise be of benefit for future groups. As could be seen from comments in the diaries, this fact led to satisfaction for the participants.

An unexpected result that was not anticipated based on the literature review was the opportunity for peer review that led to self-reflection in participants. This was of great importance to the young girls attending the programme. The power of it became apparent in the end-of-programme chat which took place on the last evening on the hike out. Reflecting on the time at Mittagundi and the values that the young people treasure, Participant Q named 'family' as a value and broke down in tears. When she had collected herself, she told the group that her time at Mittagundi had made her realise that she did not spend enough time with her family. Instead, she said she locked herself into her room all the time. Further, Participant A said she realised on the programme that she surrounded herself with people that did not have a good influence on her. While these things are certainly not easy to change, it seemed that the programme had triggered powerful insights and possibly provided a step in the direction of change.

Another contrasting result to the literature relates to the benefits of animal contact. At the time of the research, Mittagundi had five cows, a few chickens and two horses. The participants came into contact with one of the horses on the hikes in and out of the farm, where it was used as a packhorse to carry a portion of the group equipment. Everybody was given a chance to lead the horse, an experience that was positively reviewed by several participants. However, apart from milking the cow and occasionally feeding the chickens, there was only minor animal contact during the farm days. Clearly the focus was on other activities, therefore no real benefits could be observed.

### **4.3.3 The power of well-facilitated adrenaline-driven activities**

The research also aimed to establish how the benefits of farming activities compare to the benefits derived from the more adventurous activities. The major impact of the abseiling on participants was somewhat unexpected, yet impressive.



It is debatable whether the impact of farming activities on self-esteem can compare to the boost in self-confidence, and feelings of pride that came from abseiling. The higher the level of fear that needed to be overcome, the greater the benefit for the young person. It is noteworthy that the facilitation of the abseiling activity with its connection to comfort zones and reflective talks before and after the activity was outstanding. Without these discussions, the outcome may have been less significant.

The water sledding on the other hand was appreciated mainly for being an entertaining activity, and did not foster any deeper insights for the young people. The nature of the activity may make a difference though. At the time of the research the water level of the river was too low and the originally scheduled activity of rafting had to be cancelled. Instead the young people went sledding and while there were a few faster rapids, it was mainly just floating or walking the sled along the particularly low parts. It would be interesting to see whether rafting, which is more team intensive, would bring different results.

#### **4.3.4 Implications for the future**

Unlike the reviewed literature, this study has been conducted in a place which does not solely focus on farming activities but offers them as a substantial part of its programmes. Despite the relatively short duration of ten days, the Mittagundi programme is a very holistic concept, combining an experience of a simple, sustainable way of life with purposeful farming activities. Participants ease in and out of this experience through overnight hiking and bush camping, and a hint of adventure is added through abseiling and rafting. This may well be the ultimate recipe for a successful programme.

An integral part of the programme is the simplistic lifestyle. Firstly, it provides a certain challenge, making the programme appealing not only to city youths but also those with a more rural background who might not be attracted by the farm environment alone. Secondly, without doubt the ten days would not have resulted

in the same group atmosphere with technological devices and electricity present. Without the option of distracting themselves with mobile phones, internet, and without the comfort of a warm, brightly lit room to retreat to with a clique of friends, the young people not only had to deal with their peers and each other's differences, but also with their own thoughts and with the unusual sound of absolute silence. It is something that is desperately needed but seldom occurs in our fast-paced world today, and the degree of challenge that participants perceived in handing over their modern devices is a testament to the fact. The potentially destructive effect of modern technological devices on real-life social interaction became apparent at the train station at the end of the programme. One girl was observed sitting in the grass, playing with her phone in a world of her own, completely unaware that two metres away from her some of the girls whom she had spent the last ten days with were saying goodbye.

The programme encourages young people to reflect on the way they lead life, and many stated certain intentions to do things differently or try something at home which they have learnt. However, intention to change certain habits comes easily, but acting on those intentions is the largest hurdle to overcome. It would be interesting to find out whether Participant U really started growing garlic after returning home and whether or not Participant A managed to change her circle of friends, and whether Participant Q is spending more time with her family now. The question if and to what extent, the benefits are long-lasting and have been carried forth into the young people's 'city lives' would be interesting follow-up research a few months after the programme. It would provide an insight into whether programmes such as this have the power to initiate change in young people, however small it may be, and thus make it even easier to advocate their relevance. Further, it would provide information about the ideal duration, and which activities had the biggest impact and should thus be included, in order to make programmes as beneficial as possible. Based on this research alone, for example, the question arises whether the water sledding activity could be replaced by an activity that provides more personal insights or group benefits.

While the research showed that almost all components had a positive effect on young people, it remains questionable whether farming activities alone would provide the same level of benefit or whether it is this unique combination of giving young people what they want while providing a good dose of what they need (Stapleton, 1988). In order to make a more reliable statement about the benefits of farming activities and a simplistic lifestyle in outdoor education programmes it would be advantageous to research several different groups and compare the results. This was not possible within the thesis time frame, but it would certainly lead to more in-depth results.

However, even if an all-encompassing approach such as Mittagundi's, is not possible, the many facets of proven benefits gained through purposeful activities on the farm, reported by participants in this study, emphasise the potential that they have in outdoor education programmes. In combination with an absence of technological devices they would create an escape for young people and enable them to reflect more.

## 5. Conclusion

Outdoor education programmes are an essential tool for bringing nature back into the lives of young people. They can draw the participant away from a fast paced, technology driven lifestyle, and into a natural world that is experienced through all senses, to participate in activities that are inherently connected with nature. However, many outdoor education providers set their focus on adrenaline-driven activities and thus fail to extract the benefits available through slower-paced activities. This research established whether or not farming activities and a simplistic lifestyle are a feasible expansion to outdoor education programmes.

The research results reveal that young people gain a wide range of benefits from both purposeful farming activities, and experiencing a simplistic lifestyle. On top of the list are social benefits, deriving as a natural by-product from undertaking various tasks around the farm together with peers and leaders. The acquisition of new skills and a fulfilling sense of achievement from being able to contribute to the farm were also reported to be of value. The sustainable, simplistic lifestyle had an especially great impact. Without the concept of 'time' participants found themselves more in tune with the natural rhythms, waking up with the sunrise and going to bed soon after it has set. The absence of modern day amenities led to an appreciation for things that are usually taken for granted. In the simplistic farm environment, participants were able to immerse themselves in the moment, and came to the realisation that happiness could be found without the distraction of technology. Generally, the young people showed varying degrees of self-reflection, often based on reviewing their peers' behaviour, and many expressed intentions to carry forth certain aspects of farm life into their 'city lives'. Over the course of the ten days, some of the young people developed a strong sense of belonging to Mittagundi and its people.

While abseiling is commonly found in outdoor education programmes, indicating that it has proven benefits, the impact it had on young people's self-esteem was still somewhat unexpected and cannot be replicated in the farming activities

in such a short time frame. The research at Mittagundi has shown that simple farming activities in combination with well-facilitated adrenaline-driven activities, such as abseiling, proved to be a successful concept.

It can thus be concluded that integrating farming activities into outdoor education programmes has great potential. They can counteract the fast-past nature of modern lifestyles and provide greater time for reflection:

“[...] in the hope that, in a world constantly trying to impress our young people with bigger and bigger aims and achievements, they may realise that some things don't change, and that all the efficiency and material success in the world, can never make up for what is lost in a life that never experiences the joy of a really happy, purposeful community, or the quality that comes from wanting to share your life, and the material things in it, with the others around you” (Stapleton, 1988, p. ix).

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# Appendix

## Appendix I: Diary Participant A

day 2, 16/4/16

the hike so far has been really tough but also incredibly rewarding. The people are so positive and kind, it is easy to feel comfortable in the environment. Everyone is extremely genuine, caring and funny!

Samson the gorgeous horse has been carrying our group luggage, we are all very thankful for him! It is very weird not knowing the time, but it really helps you just live in the moment. I am looking forward to finally arriving at Mittagundi ~~tom~~  
~~orrow~~ tomorrow.

day 3, 17/4/16

once again we were woken up bright and early. The hike today was very hilly and we crossed many small creeks. It was amazing seeing all of the different scenery. All of the girls have been lovely so far, it is so nice being surrounded with such nice people all the time. We finally arrived at Mittagundi, and we all felt so accomplished!

We learnt all the ~~work~~ jobs to do here, and FINALLY got a hot shower! it is like another world here, so peaceful and so stress free even though there is work to do. We definitely have all had the best time so far and cannot wait for the next 10 days.

day 4, 18/4/16

we went abseiling today! It was a crazy experience that pushed a ~~to~~ lot of us out of our comfort zone, but we all really enjoyed. the hike up the mountain was tough but the view at the top of the mitt gorge was breath taking. We had a really good chat with the leaders, they're all such lovely and inspiring people who are amazing to be around. When we were abseiling I was so nervous at first, but once I was free hanging and looking at the incredible view I felt much better. Being so

high up just looking at the world beneath your feet is a feeling I can't describe, but would love to feel again.. When we got back to camp we helped chop up some wood, which was actually quite challenging but lots of fun, and it's good to know you're helping people by cutting that wood. I've learnt the importance of being selfless and doing things to help other people. At abseiling every single person was extremely encouraging and supportive to each other. It was so nice to watch everyone be selfless. I've had a really good day in the company of all the girls and leaders.

#### day 5 19/4/16

we woke up early (like always) but today decided to stay on the farm to help out. We started collecting cow poo for the garden which was hard work but satisfying! We got to put it on the garden and it was good to see how it was helping the vegetables. [Volunteer A] taught us about soil and dung beetles which was really interesting. Later we went to the joinery and learnt about the tools. I tried to make a necklace but it broke 3 times! In the afternoon I was in the kitchen making dinner which was stir fry. It was super cool to help with the dinner job. We then sat around the campfire and had a reflection seeing we were halfway through the camp. It made me really appreciate that we were here and encouraged me to cherish every moment. I think everyone here is grateful to be here and we are all so thankful to have each other here with us. It has been a really wonderful experience so far and I have gotten so many skills and qualities out of it. It is so sad to think that in 5 more days it will be over. so for now I am trying to focus on right now, and right now I am so thankful to be here. I am excited for another amazing adventure tomorrow.

#### day 6 20/4/16

This morning I got up early to milk the cow! The cow was so friendly and nice until she tried kicking over the milk bucket and sticking her foot in it. Milking Arnie was such a weird experience but also really cool. Today we also went water sledding on the Mitta Mitta river. It was so cold in the water so we wore wetsuits

and thermals! It was a really fun activity, even though we all fell off heaps of times we had lots of laughs. In the afternoon we halloed chop up and move wood which was pretty hard work. We had an amazing pizza for dinner and after that [Leader B] played the guitar for us. He was really incredibly good, and being a person who really appreciates music, I really enjoyed it. We spent the night singing around the fire and it was really comforting and nice.

#### day 7 21/4/16

today I stayed on the farm. I spent all morning with [the director] at the garden helping build the fence. It was very difficult and tiring work but we got lots of posts in the ground so it was good to know that we were contributing. For lunch some girls had made an amazing soup with fresh bread and it was so good. We then started cleaning out our cabins and packing our bags for the hike out tomorrow. It is really sad to think about how soon we will be leaving here, I have so far made so many amazing memories here and it is going to be hard to leave it all behind. In the afternoon we went into the paddock to clear out weeds which was pretty fun. For our last night at Mittagundi we all sang together around the fire, it was really peaceful and comforting. [Leader A] read us a bedtime story and a few people played songs for us. It was a very happy night.

#### 24/4/16

We have been hiking home for the past 3 days. It has been really tough but it was a challenge that we all got through together. We got to walk up a big mountain yesterday which was super hard but the view at the top was amazing! We have stopped along many creeks and waterfalls which were all lovely and made the hike that little bit more bearable. Everyone has been so supportive and encouraging to each other which has also been really helpful. We woke up super early this morning under the stars, hiked out in the dark and watched the sunrise which was super special. I am excited to go home and see my family but I know I will really miss my second family I have made at Mittagundi.

## leaving

I am super sad to leave everyone today. Mittagundi has taught me many incredible things that I know I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I have learnt how to be happy without all the extra things like technology in your life. I have learnt to surround myself with positivity all the time, surrounding myself with people and things that make me feel good about myself. I always feel happy and myself around everyone at Mittagundi. I have learnt how to live life in the simplest way and still feel amazingly happy. I know what it feels like to be honest and just be yourself. I have had the most amazing 10 days, that have taught me so much about life, happiness, honesty, friendship, simplicity and positivity. I have made memories I will carry with me ~~for every~~ forever and ever. I am beyond thankful!!!

## Appendix II: Diary Participant B

### Day 2

- Today started with the leaders waking us up to their 'amazing' singing.
- The Hike that commenced today was both a challenge mentally as it was physically.
- A negative of the hike was the lack of toilets. It added to the experience of Mittagundi but wasn't that pleasant.
- Helped prep dinner today was a fun experience as we were all laughing and joking around whilst cutting the vegetables.

Dinner: Curry

### Day 3

Today started out early with the leaders once again waking us up with their lovely singing.

Today people were more determined to start walking as we all new our final destination Mittagundi. Along the way it challenged people more than the first day as we walked both up and down rocky and mountainous terrain. Personally the most challenging part of the walk was ~~the~~ the final walk up the drive way. As by that point we had used up all our energy and started to form bruises from the heavy packs. The best moment of the day was finally entering the camp grounds.

While we were winding down for the night my cabin started to reflect on things in life we take for granted such as flushing toilets, comfy beds, showers, warm meals and being warm and comfy in the clothes we wear. If there is anything I learned from today was not to take things for granted.

Breaky: Porridge    Lunch: Open which    Dinner: Lasagne

### Day 3 4

Today I woke up early and milked the cow. The experience was new and exciting as it was a new experience. After that I got ready for Breakfast. Today I had a farm day. My first activity was shoveling horse poop into wheel barrows then we

put the horse poop into the vegi gardens. Surprising this wasn't bad at all as it didn't stinck or stick to your shoes. My second activity I made a spoon which didn't look much like a spoon but was still proud of my achievements in making how much I did. My last activity was in the kitchen preparing afternoon tea and dinner.

A highlight of the day was preparing dinner tonight with [Participant E, Leader E, Participant G] as we laughed and had a great time. To end the night all the groups girls started singing songs from pitch perfect Riff off. Looking forward to tomorrow.

Breaky: Porridge

Lunch: Shepards Pie

Dinner: Baked Potatoes

### Day 5

Today was the mark of the half way point to this camp. It felt like an accomplishment as well as being a bitter sweet moment. Today I was awoken by an annoying rooster who didn't know the difference between the moon and the sun. Whilst the 3 girls from my cabin were milking the cow, the rest of us started to pack for our day out absailing. The drive to the absailing site was filled with games and stories. After the drive came the walk to the top of the hill. This felt like nothing after walking 2 days with a back pack that felt like it was 60 kg heavy. Once we were there we learned how to go down the hill safely. My Biggest goal coming to Mit-taguni was conquiring my fears and assailing. I am proud to say that I achieved it not once but twice. Once back at the farm I help cut and stack wood in a Bee hive manner. Just saying cutting ~~were~~ wood is harder than people think. Towards the end of the day the leaders took us outside after dinner and had a conversation about what we achieved. How our values and morals have changed and how we grown as people. This convo let us all connect on a deeper level and basically told everyone we are the same and that we won't judge each other. The night ended with stories of peoples lives in our cabin.

Breaky: Porridge

Lunch: Open witch

Dinner: Stir Fry

Dessert: Rice pudding

### Day 6

Today I had a farm day which involved removing weeds and unwanted trees from the paddok. During this the 3 other girls, leaders and I played guess the famous person/character and told each other riddles to buy the time. After ~~aftern~~ morning tea I went to help out build the winter hut which was an amazing experience to know you ~~erated~~ had a part in creating and leaving a positive mark on Mittagundi. After lunch I went to the kitchen and helped prepare bread and dinner. Dinner took along time as we had to create 13 batches of dough/. After dinner which was delicious the group cleaned up and had a sing along this time a lot of the leaders joined in on the jam session.

Breakfast: Porridge Cinnamon

Lunch: Mac n Cheece

Dinner: Pizza

Dessert: Chocolate cake

### Day 7

Today I woke up and packed my bad for rafting as well as change into my thermals. After breakfast we went up to the rafting shed and got suited up into a wet suit, runners, helmet and PFD which stands for Personal Floatation Device. Once we got to the venue we learned everything as well as having morning tea. The water was really cold and my feet and hands were completely numb. During rafting/sleding I was stuck on every rock and flipped on every second one. A ~~memra~~ memorable moment was when I turned the corner and face planted into the water. We sleded then stoped for lunch then sleded again. Once we reached the end we got out got changed and headed back to camp. We packed our bags and had showers. Had dinner sang then went to bed.

### Day 8

Today we were awoken by one of the leaders by their harmonica playing skills. We had to pack everything and sweep out our cabins. After breakfast we purchased merchandise and took photos then started our hike back home. It was challenging but we got through it.

Breakfast: Porridge

Lunch: Open which

Dinner: Pasta + vegi

### Day 9

Today we were awoken by the leaders singing the circle of life from the Lion King. Last night was very cold and found it hard to sleep. Today we walked another 10km and we have walked a total of 45km. We also made a pit stop and climbed the 3rd highest Mountain in Victoria. As well as having lunch at a beautiful waterfall we made it to camp safely and now awaiting to moz journey.

Breakfast: Porridge    Lunch: Open whiches    Dinner: Curry



## Appendix III: Diary Participant C

### Day 3 - Mittagundi

First of all - sorry [researcher], I didn't have a pen until now.

I am having a really good time and everyone is so nice and positive and I can feel mittagundi is making me realise all the things we take for granted and even though I already appreciate a lot of things I am so glad for simple things and I am making really good friends. [Participant T] and [Participant U] are so nice and they are really easy to get along with.

I love the simple life, this place is making me so at piece and down to earth, I feel like I belong in the nature and I really love all this stuff we are doing and I enjoy being away from everything, literally leaving your troubles behind.

I love it here - I really want to come back as a leader when I finsih university. The garden and self ~~sustainable~~-sustainable foods and water and cooking and heating mechanisms is all really cool and I think that everyone should live the simple life like people used to and be so calm and relaxed and leave technology and internet away.

Their are a lot of different people and personalities in the groups and as well as everyone is respecting each other people need to respect what they are given, some people are just so disrespectful of the food and effort in the cooking and are unwilling to try new things.

The ~~fa~~ feeling of achievement was so good when we finished the hike and arrived at ~~The~~ Mittagundi, things ~~main~~ mean so much more in the end when you have to put time and effort in. I am really connecting with some of the people here and now that we have arrived people are being themselves a bit ~~ma~~ more and are becoming more comfortable and open with the group.

#### Day 4 - Mittagundi

Today was really good, our group (river cabin) went abseiling today and everyone supported others and a lot of people ~~went~~ went out of their comfort zones.

Everyone is relaxing and true personalities and qualities are ~~came~~ coming out and people are ~~became~~ becoming more relaxed around everyone. I can ~~every~~ even feel myself relaxing and I just notice how I am not as reserved as before.

I am so thankful for all these things we usually take for ~~grat~~ granted like a really comfortable bed and the food here is so GOOD, I want to make all my oven meals at home now, all of everything here is so simple.

After abseiling we got back and I went into the vegetable garden and I really learnt alot and had some good chats with [Leader F] and [Volunteer A]. I learnt a lot about soil and gardens and I could really relate to them and I had so much fun helping with the garden, I really want to go to the joinery and make something.

Another thing I have noticed is that some of the younger people (13-14 year olds) are less mature and are being ~~iri irat~~ irritating and annoying-silly, like squirting people with water and talking all night, also they are lacking some respect to others and the great food, but most of the people are nice but as I ~~menti~~ mentioned before peoples personalities are coming out more and I really want to accept everyone but for some people it is bringing out some bad qualities as well as good.

But all around I ~~am~~ am having a really great time, but the days are going so fast and I ~~want~~ want it to last ~~ton~~ longer.

I miss my cats and plants at home and I am really looking forward to talking to [friend] ~~we~~ when I get back, but I am not looking forward to catching up on school work. I really am looking ~~fowa frowar~~ forward to going to the joinery and I ~~wa~~ really want to make something for myself and [friend], because I know that she really appreciates things like that. I really want to go and help in the garden tomorrow, it is so nice and I just want to learn new things and help out.

### Day 5 - Mittagundi

I keep waking up really early and I am usually a morning person but I think that it is probably 5 or 4.30 in the morning which makes me wonder what time we go to sleep because I am not tired. Our cabin (river cabin) has fairly ~~quia~~ quiet sleepers but after last night's dinner (baked beans) a lot of people are farting in their sleep. right now I am writing to pass time because I am waiting for ~~some~~ someone to wake up the milking people so maybe I will be able to do something when they leave, that is if anyone else is awake.

The sky is becoming brighter now so I might actually be able to see what I am writing soon. I haven't seen any kangaroo's this morning but there were a lot ~~was~~ yesterday, I went outside last night to go to the toilet and the stars and milky way were so much brighter than they are at my house in beechworth, one thing I do ~~miss~~ miss is seeing an amazing sunrise in the morning, I haven't seen one here yet but maybe there ~~has~~ hasn't been enough clouds to reflect and capture light and ~~have pretty colours~~ form all the pretty colours across the sky.

I had a lot of fun at the joinery today. I made a couple of ~~neckl~~ necklaces and it was super awesome we also went to the winter hut and I had a lot of fun chiseling and putting up the ~~vera~~ veranda and that was really ~~good~~ good because it was nice to hear some music again.

This evening we sat around the campfire and talked about our experiences at Mittagundi and how we were feeling, that was kind of weird for me because I don't like to talk about emotions and things because I am ~~not~~ not a very emotional person but it was interesting to see people talk about themselves, general topics and their goals and views, even if some people were a ~~bit~~ bit hypocritical but oh well.

### Day 6 - Mittagundi

I am really ~~loking~~ looking forward to going sledging (rafting?) on the river, I think it's going to be ~~awson~~ awesome fun and I am also wanting to drench my hair because it is so poofy and oily and the river ~~wiel~~ will clean it somewhat. I actually

~~sleep~~ slept a lot last night and actually woke up at a reasonable hour, which was good.

I can't believe it has gone so quickly, I want to be on the farm longer, I really enjoy the ~~farm days~~ farm days but hiking back out will still be fun and I can get ~~pieh~~ pictures of things that I didn't get last time, also I really love ~~the the munchies~~ the munchies and am looking forward to eating them again.

### Day 7 - Mittagundi

I had a really good day today, I really enjoyed working in the forge, all of these new learning experiences are really expanding my breath of ~~kwonledge~~ knowledge and I am really taking a lot out of all of the activities and it is such a good place and after being here for a few days I realise that things, all things, are better when they're simpler.

## Appendix IV: Diary Participant D

### Mittagundi Day 1 and 2

The first day we did a lot of travelling! I caught the train from Melbourne to Albury which was surprisingly lots of fun! There was a group of girls on the train going to Mittagundi, we met and talked, eventually playing a big game of uno. The whole time I felt very included and welcomed. When we met the leaders and volunteers they were awesome! Day 1 was overall tiring, exciting, super fun and exhilarating. I learnt so much from waterproofing our sleeping bags and packs to being thankful for the little things. The dinner was amazing and very nutritious: veggie pasta! A main part of the day for me was handing in all of our modern day items, we left them all behind ready for a big challenge!

### Day 2

Today was a big day! We packed up our tents after being woken up at dawn with the kookaburras and the lovely singing from the leaders. We learnt how important a good breakfast is and how we needed the energy for the big hike ahead. The hiking was hard at times, challenging but most of all, amazing. The scenery was incredible. Mountain ranges surrounded us, it was beautiful. We all had turns of walking Samson, the gorgeous Cleysdale horse. [Leader A] and [Leader E] were awesome along with [Volunteer A] and [Researcher] the wonderful volunteers, I really loved talking to everyone. Stopping for lunch was the best! We ate fresh homemade bread from Mittagundi with relish and veggies, it was delicious. Each time we left a spot we would do an 'emu bob' making sure we hadn't left a trace in the environment. After a tiring first day of hiking we reached our camping spot for the night, a clearing near a river. I loved filling up our drink bottles with fresh water from the stream. We all had jobs to do before dinner, chopping food, making a toilet spot or collecting water. We all had a role to play.

### Day 3 ~ Hiking to Mittagundi

Once again we woke with the sun, how beautiful. Who needs time?! The hike was hard, uphill and challenging. The fog was incredible! ~~After~~ I began to appreciate where I was walking, how wonderful the land was. After a massive day of hiking we were nearly at Mittagundi, when we reached the Mitta Mitta river we sat down. [Leader E] told us the history of Mittagundi and how it came to be. We were all very excited about reaching Mittagundi, we walked fast! The last leg was along the river and up the big hill but it was so worth it!

Mittagundi was amazing, we walked in to a big welcome with yummy ~~fruit~~ carrot cake! :)

Oh my goodness, I nearly forgot to mention dinner! The lasagna was actually so incredible! Yum yum yum!

### Day 4 ~ abseiling! wooohoo!

Today was awesome! I had a great day and ~~became~~ got to know the people in my group a lot better. The abseiling was scary but satisfying too! For me, it made me step out of my comfort zone a little which I really loved. [Leader D] sat us in a circle and we spoke about comfort zones, it was good to see that abseiling was a challenge ~~for everyone~~. The car ride home was great fun! We talked about lots of entertaining events with a break at a campsite. We played a massive game of intense paper scissors rock. Go [Participant N]!

We got back and got straight into woodchopping, it was really hard but good to get into, hearing the split of the wood was super satisfying!

Dinner again, was awesome! Beans, coleslaw, baked potatoes...yummy!

Dishwashing is actually a great part of the day, singing and laughing is so much fun! Before bed we sat around the fire singing, I'm loving Mittagundi!

### Day 5

Wow, this keeps getting better and better! Today for the River group we had a great day on the farm. It started off with [Leader C] teaching [Participant C, Participant T, Participant U] and I ~~the~~ how everything worked in the joinery. I made a

necklace with a really good piece of advice from [Leader C]. He told me to keep going even if it's hard. I loved fixing the wood splitter and felt that I was contributing to the farm. After a delicious morning tea of fruit and CHOCOLATE CAKE! we I went and worked in the garden. [Volunteer A] taught me some great things and I loved working hard, planting veggies, that would one day feed future young people at Mittagundi. After an amazing lunch of pesto pasta I headed to the kitchen! There we were with [Leader C] and I made a coconut cake for the cupboard. We then picked dry basil and put it in jars, it was great to see how sustainable the farm was. The dinner we made was stir fry. I had lots of fun chopping up veggies and coming up with our performance!

One of my most memorable moments so far was the chat we had after dinner around the campfire. It was a time to reflect on our experiences so far and set goals for the next coming days. I really loved it. We all got to say how we were feeling. I felt so happy and secure with the people I was surrounded with. My goal by the end of Mittagundi is to take all the chances I get and expand my comfort zone. It was a super special time sitting around the fire and the support and respect in our group was incredible. I'm really loving not using electricity, keeping life simple. I think that's the key.

### Day 6

Today was our sledding day! I enjoyed a great hot bowl of cinnamon porridge for breakfast and got ready for a big day. We fitted ourselves with shoes, a helmet and a wetsuit, to making sure we had our thermals and woollen socks on. We got to the river and , oh man (I sound like [Participant R]!) the water was freezing! We learnt all of the essential skills we needed for the water such as how to communicate in the water. Off we went! We paddled/ floated down the Mitta Mitta river, laughing lots and having an awesome time. The rapids were tricky but everyone helped each other and we had such a great time. We were warmly welcomed to lunch with hot chocolate. Yum! We had open wishes for lunch made by [Leader A]. They were really good, I'm beginning to really appreciate how good the food we have is and how lucky we are. After singing lots of songs and warm-

ing up in the sun we set off down the river again. After many rapids, happy screams + laughs we reached the end. It was a great experience! After slightly cold showers I got into the wood chopping. It was awesome!

The dinner was pizza, super delicious!

[Leader B] played guitar and sung for us all which was absolutely remarkable. I would really like to learn how to play guitar now, he was so inspiring. [Participant G]+ I sung too which was nice. Mittagundi is such a beautiful place, I don't want to go.

### Day 7

Today was our last full day ~~on the fa~~ at Mittagundi. Our group, the River cabin had a day on the farm. I worked in the forge which was GREAT! We, [Participant N] and I, made hooks for the new winter hut that is being built. We learnt all about what goes on in the forge and how everything works. I found it really interesting seeing how things like the drill worked without electricity. Everything was done by hand. I love the simplicity. [The director] came and helped us put a post in the garden fence that is being built. It felt great to be contributing to Mittagundi. After a delicious lunch of soup we packed our bags ready for the hike out tomorrow. It's sad to be leaving. I definitely want to come back on a follow up program or as a volunteer. I have got to know everyone really well which is great! Our last dinner was so much fun! We all dressed up and [Leader E, Volunteer A] and [Leader D] did a hilarious performance. We had a roast for dinner which was really amazing, followed by a superb fruit crumble! I loved it! After everything was cleaned up ~~Me~~ [Leader A] read us a really beautiful book about Thanks. It made me realise how we should all really appreciate the things we have. THANK YOU MITTAGUNDI!

[Participant G] and I sung afterwards to everyone which was special.

[Leader B] played again which was absolutely amazing.



### Day 8 ~ hiking out

Today we had to ~~stay~~ say goodbye to Mittagundi. It was sad leaving and saying goodbye to those who weren't coming hiking, but it was exciting to be heading off. The hike, I must say, was pretty challenging. It was mostly uphill which was hard but we remained positive! A group of us ~~made~~ made a promise to only be positive, it was great! Our munchies were amazing! I need the recipe. When we finally arrived after a long, challenging hike we set up camp which is always fun! [Participant R, Participant Q, Participant G] and I made dinner, Reddog pasta! It was delicious. We cleaned up and had a spontaneous dance with [Leader D]! She is so much fun! After our dancing, [Leader D] read us the Lorax, which had a great message to it. I have learnt so much. I'm lying in my tent with [Participant N] and [Participant S], it's really lovely to have made new friends. I have loved this experience so much!

### Day 9

This morning we woke up and outside was FREEZING! There was frost on all of our tents and even ice in [Participant H]'s drink bottle. We ate hot porridge and did some stretches with [Volunteer A] which warmed us all up. We packed up and headed on our way. The walk today was hard but pretty amazing, we pushed on with positive attitudes and funny stories. For me, the best part of the day was climbing up Mt. Nelse. We left our packs at the bottom with [Leader D] and Sampson. There were lots of tricky riddles with [Leader A] which kept us entertained while hiking to the top. Oh my, the view was absolutely incredible. We could see mountains in every direction, it was beautiful. There were lots of laughs and pictures. The walk to the campsite was pretty cruisy and we arrived quickly. We set up and it started getting colder. Thermals on and we got ready for dinner. It was a very yummy curry! Af Oh my goodness, I I haven't laughed so hard in ages! We were playing a game around the fire and you had to work out how it went. [Participant R] was so hilarious! After dinner we all set down and reflected on how far we have come and what we want to take home from Mittagundi. it was

really special. I'm lying in my tent now ready for our last day. I'm happy but sad to be leaving. I hope I will come back.

### Day 10

Well, this is it. We have all packed up and we are at Ropers hut. We got up extra early and hiked with the sun rising and the full moon over our heads. It was really amazing. When we arrived at the trope we were given hot chocolate and delicious apple muffins! It was really sad saying goodbye to [Leader A] and [Leader D], I will really miss them lots. They were so much fun to hang out with. I have just got everyone's contact details and I hope we can all stay in touch! I have loved Mittagundi so so much and I really want to come back, it has been an incredible highlight in my life.

To [researcher],

Thanks so much for coming and volunteering. It has been great getting to know you all and all about Germany! I hope you find this diary useful for your studies, good luck with everything! Sorry about the messy writing in this diary, it was done in cars, tents and sitting out late at night! Thank you for the diary, I hope it is helpful.

Thanks! [Participant D] :-)

## Appendix V: Diary Participant E

### Day 3

Dear Diary,

Today we hiked another 10 km. We woke up at the crack of dawn although I don't know exactly when because we don't have any watches, which I have to admit, I don't like. We had porridge for breakfast, which a few people didn't like. I don't mind porridge, but it was still annoying when people refused to eat breakfast.

Anyway, we walked 5km until lunchtime, and we had an open sandwich. It was pretty good and it was nice to rest because we were all exhausted. so after lunch we kept on walking, told a few riddles and finally arrived at Mittagundi. Just before we got to Mittagundi we passed a road, which really annoyed me because we had to walk 20km over the past 2 days but we could have just drove. So when we finally got here, we were split into 2 groups and I was separated ~~into~~ from all my friends. I nearly cried. Why would they do that to me? I made 2 really good friends out of [Participant T] and [Participant U] and I obviously knew [Participant A] and [Participant C], I just don't see why they would do that. Anyway, I had a shower + felt better.

[Participant E] xox

[drawing of "awesome hat"]

### Day 4

Dear Diary,

Today we had a farm day. In the morning we went to the ~~join~~ joinery. I made a really pretty necklace that I worked really hard on. I was rather proud of it. After that we went to the garden and helped [Leader B] with taking nails out of old pieces of wood. We then had lunch, which was a delicious Shepards Pie. After lunch we went to the kitchen, with [Participant G], [Participant B] + [Leader E]. It was so fun and crazy! We all mucked around and joked about green vegetables which was hilarious. Also, we made baked potatoes and everyone said they were

delicious! I also started wearing this cool sequinned cowboy ~~hand~~ hat! I had an awesome day!

[Participant E] xox

### Day 5

Dear Diary,

Today was a really great day! We started the day off by going abseiling. I was really excited and I really enjoyed it! The view was amazing: it was a view of the Mitta Mitta river and the surrounding valley of trees. It was just breath-taking. For morning tea we had delicious chocolate tea. While we were eating [researcher] accidentally stole my spot and she very nicely gave it back to me. [researcher] is so nice!

After abseiling we came back to Mittagundi and had afternoon tea, which were the savoury muffins that [Leader E], [Participant B] + [Participant G] + I made yesterday. Not wanting to brag, but they were great! We then split into groups + I did knitting. It was so fun, I had some really good chats!

After a dinner of stirfry we had a really good Dn'M session. Everyone just really opened up and it was just really refreshing.

[Participant E] xox

P.S. I need to ~~wet~~ write a letter to [Leader A] about amethysts.

P.P.S. We saw a lizard + named it Sir Barry Bob Mordecai the third.

[drawing of "Yummy vege pizza!"]

### Day 6

Dear Diary

Today was a farm day, but before I tell you more about that, in the morning when I was going for a pee, I saw a jumping movement and I looked up to see about five kangaroos just staring at me. I stared back for about five minutes before they bounced off. It was an amazing and unique experience!

Anyway, today in the morning we went to the forge and made hooks for the Winter hut with [Participant M] + [Leader D]. Then we had ~~afternoon~~ morning tea and after that we went to Winter hut and I played Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence and a duet with [Participant B] which was fun!

After a lunch of Mac and Cheese ~~we~~ I went cooking with [Participant B, Participant T, Participant M] and [Leader C]. We made pizza and it was really yummy! Then after dinner we had a singing session with [Leader B] and [Participant L]. I also learnt how to play Allehuia on the Ukulele. Also [Leader B] was amazing but we couldn't clap!

[Participant E] xox

### Day 7

Dear Diary,

Today I did milking AGAIN because no one else wanted to and I really enjoyed it! Then we had porridge with an apple and cinnamon stew thing and it was good although I put a bit too much ~~porridge~~ cinnamon on it! It still tasted good though. For ~~a~~ most of the day after that we went sledding on the Mitta Mitta river. We stopped for lunch at the halfway point and also had hot chocolate because all our fingers were numb from the freezing cold water. After lunch + a bit of a dance about bananas we kept on sledding. Unfortunately it wasn't as good as the first half of the sledding because my sled had dramatically deflated but I still really enjoyed myself.

After sledding we got back to Mittagundi and packed our bags for tomorrow. We then all had nice warm showers which were very luxurious!

At dinner we dressed up and I dressed up as a bride + I married [Participant T]. It was so funny, everyone laughed heaps + I was (I am) very happy.

[Participant E] xox

P.S. We had apple crumble with custard for dessert. Yummy!

## Appendix VI: Diary Participant F

Today we hiked and dinner was delicious, leading Samson was great, I really enjoyed it.

I'm loving it so far, already making so many friends.

16/4/16

[Participant F]

: -)

Today we finally arrived at Mittagundi and it's amazing!

I'm loving it so far, the shower was amazing and the dinner was delicious!

I'm enjoying the company of all the girls and the leaders.

I loved having the opportunity to walk Sampson.

17/4/16

[Participant F] : -)

Today we went abseiling, it was great because all the girls were able to support each other and support whatever their decision was, whether it was to do the abseiling or not to do it, but it was great that everyone was able to have a go at it. All the girls are becoming so close it doesn't feel like we met only 4 days ago. Chopping the wood was great fun and dinner was amazing!!!

18/4/16

[Participant F] : -)

Today we ~~were~~ stayed at the farm and had a day of working on the farm.

It was great, I really enjoyed it and I really do feel like I contributed to Mittagundi now which feels like a real ~~privilage~~ privilege.

We were in the kitchen with [Leader B] today and it was great fun, we cooked ~~dinner~~ lunch up which was pesto pasta and it turned out amazing.

The talk we had ~~am~~ around the farm was great, I feel like everyone was able to really able to talk about anything and everything. We were really able to reflect on the time we're ~~able to~~ had at Mittagundi which was great.

Dinner was yum too!!!

- [Participant F] :-)

19/4/16

Today we went white water rafting (sleding) I loved it! The whole group was able to work together and I think everyone enjoyed themselves quite a bit. I feel like I was able to get along and talk to a lot of girls that I hadn't really had a good laugh with yet.

[Leader F, Volunteer A, Leader E] and [Leader B] were all great to have a laugh with. I enjoy all of their company.

lunch was great, [Leader A] did a great job of preparing it all for us. It tasted yum!!!

The second half of the rafting was so fun, all the rapids were so much fun and all the girls were great to have a laugh with.

~~Aft~~ When we got back to the farm we had a yummy afternoon tea, it was delicious!

After that ~~we~~ our river cabin went to the showers and it was a nice on, not quite so stressful as the first one.

I then went and collected wood with [Leader A, Leader E] and a few others which was great fun and then we had dinner which was delicious. After dinner we did dishes which was fun (as it always is).

Then we finally got to hear [Leader B] sing, I have been waiting for it!!

[Participant F] :-) xx

20/4/16

Today the River cabin had a farm day, I started my day off going to the ~~far~~ Winter Hut to help [the builder] with [Leader E, Participant R] and [Participant S].

It's great being able to contribute to the hut because I really feel like I'm able to contribute to Mittagundi that way. [Participant U] then ran over to grab us for lunch which was a yummy soup which was [Volunteer A]'s big idea. Then we

came back to the cabins and packed for the hike home which was quite fun. With [Leader D] and the girls in my cabin.

We then headed back to the dining room for afternoon tea which was ~~great fun~~ nice, then [Leader A, Participant N], and [Participant C] and I all went down to the garden to put the compost in the compost bin, and then we went and got Sampson and Lachy (the horses) and we got to brush them down which I'm so happy we got to do.

Then we joined the girls and [Leader C] with stacking the bee hives and then we went to go picking weeds with [Leader C] and [Leader B] which was a lot of fun, we then went to dinner and we got to dress up and it was roast for dinner!!!

Then we got dessert and did the dishes which was nice, and then we just started to relax and [Leader A] read us a book which was a lovely book. Then we all headed to be.

21/4/16

- [Participant F] :-)

Today we woke up extra early and started our hike up the mountain, it was definitely challenging but I think everyone felt good by the time we got to our campsite.

Dinner ~~that night~~ tonight was pasta (red dog pasta). I was feeling quite homesick ~~that night but~~ tonight but everyone was really there for me when I needed it.

After dinner [Leader D] read us a story which was a great story with a great meaning to it.

After the story we all headed to bed.

22/4/16

[Participant F] :-)

Today we woke up and I had some more porridge for breakfast and then we cleaned up our camp site and then we headed off to start our hike. We walked for a bit and then had a break because [Participant R] was having a rough time with her ankle.



Then we kept walking and had some lunch on ~~th~~ some nice rocks we found.

We kept walking and then we walked up Mount Nelse and that was such a beautiful view.

We then headed down and started to head towards our camp site for the night. We set up camp and all settled in, we had ~~lunch and~~ dinner which was a curry and then we all sat around the fire and talked about the whole 10 days which was nice. We then went ~~he~~ to bed to get ready for a early wake up the next morning.

23/4/16

- [Participant F]

Today we woke up super early. I would guess it was probably about 4-5, we cleaned up camp and we were on our way to meet [Leader E] and [Leader F].

We got yummy apple muffins and hot chocolates for breakfast, which was delicious.

We got in the troopys and ute and sadly had to say bye to [Leader A] and [Leader D].

We got to Roppers hut and had to unpack all our packs and then we headed ~~towa~~ to the train station.

It's so sad having to say bye to all the girls because it was so amazing getting to go through this unforgettable experience together.

I'll never forget this experience and these girls.

24/4/16

[Participant F] :-)

## Appendix VII: Diary Participant G

### Diary Entry Number 1

#### Day One

Today was a day filled with ~~exi~~ excitement, new faces and friendship. Starting at 3:50 am it was ~~the~~ tiring but once we were on the train our adventure began!

All the Mittagundi girls were on one carriage and we all got to know each other really well. It was lots of fun!

When we crossed the border to NSW to Albury we were all super excited!! After meeting the leaders and handing in all our modern items our journey truly began with a fun car trip to our first camp spot, Ropers Hut.

I loved my first day, all the new people I met were so lovely, kind and caring. I also loved packing our hiking bags for the next day. [~~Participant G~~] Dinner was really yummy, pasta!! ~~The~~ I enjoyed not knowing the time :)

#### Day 2

- we were woken with a lovely song by the leaders it was very funny :)
- Breakfast consisted of porridge which I enjoyed
- We packed up our tents and got ready for our hike!
- After a fun car trip to Falls Creek we had a quick toilet break and then drove to ~~our~~ the beginning of our hiking spot.
- We did some yoga stretching, met the beautiful horse Sampson and [Leader E] and [Leader A].
- Partway throughout the hike I got to lead Sampson which I loved: I had a really nice talk to [Leader A].
- Lunch was really yummy, with homemade bread and vegies.
- After a long but exciting hike we arrived in the middle of nowhere with incredible views!
- we prepared dinner which was fun (and yummy!), set up our tents, discovered good toilet spots, had yummy hot chocolate and hopped into bed! Good night!

### Day 3

With an awesome wake up our morning began with hot, yummy porridge. Once we set off for our hike we had a quick stop and filled our drink bottles with fresh but freezing creek water!

The hike was long but really great. I looked forward to the times we would stop and have our munchies. there was thick fog which was amazing! I couldn't see much ahead so it added to the adventure. Sampson did really well, sliding along the path!

About 1 km away from Mittagundi we stopped and [Leader E] told us all about the history which was really awesome.

Mittagundi is AMAZING!! I love it here already. The showers were really cool, looking out to the incredible bush. Having a proper bed really makes you feel thankful and having hot water for the shower made me feel very grateful to have hot water.

Dinner was soo yummy!! I really can't wait for the next few days here, I am so excited. Goodnight! ~[Participant G]

### Day 4

Wow. What an awesome place Mittagundi is. I love it here.

All the leaders, volunteers and girls are all so friendly and lovely. I had a fabulous day, beginning with horse poo pickup, gardening & wood work. I made a necklace which was pretty cool!

Lunch was delicious! Sheppards Pie!!

After lunch I spent my time in the kitchen, cooking baked potatoes, coleslaw, caramelised onion, savoury muffins & lovely fresh bread!! I loved the kitchen.

[Leader E] was great to work with.

I love it here so much! ~~I~~I can't wait for tomorrow, a new day and I'm milking the cow! We are also going abseiling!! I really love having no technology and no time. It's all about living in the moment :) I am now listening to a story by [Participant E]! Night ~ [Participant G]

## Day 5

I literally cannot express how I feel right now. Mittagundi is an incredible place and everyone here, all the leaders, volunteers, staff and girls are all so kind, lovely and so wonderful. All the ~~teach~~ people around me ~~are~~ have been continuously amazing, supportive and friendly. Today, abseiling was so awesome!

[Leader A], [Leader D], [researcher] and [abseiling instructor] were great!!

[Leader D] gave me so much confidence and with her 'comfort zone' talk I felt so happy to be where I was and I got a lot out of her chat. Down at the bottom of the rock [Leader A] and I had some really great conversations about how incredible Mittagundi is and about technology which was really interesting.

Everyone is just so friendly & kind, I love it here so much!

The actual abseil was so cool! I was a bit nervous/ anxious but I knew I was safe and with some lovely encouragement I went twice. It was so much fun!!

The view was INCREDIBLE!

Tonight was so amazing. We all sat around the fire and [Leader C] (the leader not the horse) led us in an awesome recollection of what we had done so far & we all shared our thoughts together. -> simple -> happy -> honest

Tonights conversation made me really think about who I am as a person & who I want to be. I love this place so much.

With no electricity, modern devices we are living a simple, honest, happy life and I am really loving it. It really makes you enjoy making your food or ~~getting~~ using ash for the toilet for the fire etc

I actually can't express in words how I feel but Mittagundi is so incredible. ~[Participant G]

## Day 6

Today I had a great day on the farm. I spent the morning with [Leader C], Annie, [Participant B] and [Participant P] in Knockers Paddock clearing weeds and unwanted plants for the cows. We did lots of riddles, it was great fun!

After morning tea I went to the forge with [Leader D] and [Participant T]. We made hooks for the new Winter hut. I loved it in there! It was great, we melted

metal & banged it ~~in the~~ into shape. Then got the metal really hot once more and twisted the metal. I loved trying new and different things :)

After a delicious lunch I went over to the Winter Hut with ~~Hiede~~ [Participant H, Participant L and Participant O] & [researcher]. [The builder] & Sparky were great and we helped [the builder] put the beams up for the veranda. Sparky was so lovely and absolutely loved pats!

After a REALLY good dinner of PIZZA we did DISHES!!!! YAY!! :-) Then we stayed up around the fire in the dining room and [Leader B] sung us three of his own songs. Oh My Goodness he was AMAZING. Listening to him gave me goosebumps. The lyrics of his songs were so meaningful. Especially the one about the Indigenous Australians. [Leader B] is such a lovely leader, always kind, smiling and helpful. That night [Participant D] and I also sung a song just ~~wit~~ for a couple of people around the fire. I loved it so much! ~ [Participant G]

### Day 7

Our sledding day!! It was an awesome day, relaxing, floating down Mitta Mitta. One part I floated down next to [Leader A] and she sung a beautiful song. She has such a lovely, lovely voice it was really nice. At one section of the river I found a really pretty leaf and gave it to [Leader A]. I found another one ~~so~~ and I still have it with me. Little things like that ~~ma~~ were very special. I got ~~very~~ ~~so~~ very cold!! But with a REALLY good hot chocolate made by [Leader B] we warmed up and had a fabulous day sledding!

When we got back to the farm we packed up our cabins and got ready for our big hike. I began to really feel how much I ~~w~~ loved Mittagundi and the simple, happy, honest way of living. An amazing dinner of ROAST cooked by [Volunteer A] & [Leader E], drew our ~~far~~ last night on the farm to an end. For dinner we all dressed up it was awesome! With one more incredible song from [Leader B] and one more song from [Participant D] and myself we climbed into our bunks. Living sustainably was one of the ~~really~~ amazing parts of Mittagundi that I really enjoyed. ~~Only~~ Using ash for the toilet ~~for the~~ from the fire, eating meat from the farm (own produce). Everyone here is SO kind and welcoming. I love it, I could

actually stay here forever!! Though I really miss my family. I look forward to seeing them a lot.

I have had such an awesome time on the farm, i'm excited for the hike out!

~[Participant G]

### Day 8

Sad, but excited at the same time. We have left Mittagundi now. I wish I could have stayed at the farm. I have loved it so so much but I am missing my family & dogs. I am not too sad to have left because I definitely know I WILL be back. Follow up programs here we come!!! Left early today. It was sad saying goodbye to [Leader B] (he didn't come hiking) he was such an awesome leader. His music is so incredible. Our hike was challenging but good. I had some great conversations with [Leader A] & [Leader D], they are both so kind and lovely, it was lots of fun! A very satisfying day hiking and I am very glad to be here in my tent nice and cosy!

Dinner was delicious!! Red Dog Pasta :)

I am very happy with my hiking, it was hard but we got it done! Yay!!

[Leader D] told us a really great story "The Lorax" which had a very good message to it. It was really nice by the fire.

I can't express in my words my feelings for how much I have loved this camp. How kind, loving and friendly everyone is and how great the life at Mittagundi is, living simply, happy, honestly. I love it so much.

I'm going to sleep now. No [Participant B] & [Participant Q] are waiting for the pen. I have had such a good day!!

Buonanotte

~[Participant G]

### Day 9

Wow. What an incredible journey it has been. Today began with a 'FREEZING' morning!! We had frost over our tent and we were all sooo cold! Once we did a few warm up exercises and had our very last Mittagundi porridge our hike began.

It was challenging but I found when I wasn't thinking about how hard it was it seemed to go a lot faster. Whilst I was hiking I really thought about my journey at Mittagundi and how special it has been for me.

We had lunch at a beautiful spot next to a waterfall!

It was a tough but satisfying hike with lots of hills!! But we did it!!!

Reaching the top of Mount Nels (3rd highest in Victoria) was incredible! All around me were mountains, so many, it was amazing. I felt so happy where I was. Up in the mountains with so many kind people.

With many riddles along our TEN day journey it was great. Some still pending in my brain for an answer!!

~~We~~ Reaching our final camp spot was so satisfying and I felt very proud of how far I ~~had~~ had come.

Dinner was yummy (curry :) ) and we had a really good chat about reflecting over our journey and about the goals we had set. It was great hearing about what everybody had gotten out of Mittagundi. I loved it so much. I am now snug down in my cosy sleeping bag & inner. "Be a winner sleep in your inner!!"

I have had such an incredible adventure though I'm looking forward to seeing everyone back home. I miss my family.

Goodnight Mittagundi. Thank you so much for such an amazing journey and such a life changing adventure. Can't wait for the early morning!

~[Participant G]

### Day 10

I am really sad to have left [Leader A] and [Leader D], [Leader B] and Sampson. We are now in the troopy just leaving Falls Creek, from the toilet break. Saying goodbye to [Leader A] ~~was~~ made me realise how much I ~~to~~ have loved Mittagundi and made me realise what an incredible time I have had. [Leader A] was so special to me and made me so happy all the time.

Always smiling she was very kind and I loved being around her just like all the other leaders and volunteers - [researcher], [Volunteer A], [Leader B], [Leader A], [Leader D], [Leader C], [Leader F], [Leader E], [the builder] (the builder with

Sparky), [abseiling instructor], [the director], Sampson, Lochy (the horse) and Army (the milking cow). All those people and all the girls have made my Mittagundi Adventure so special.

Living a SIMPLE, HAPPY & HONEST life is definitely such an important message Mittagundi has taught me. When I think about leaving I ~~got~~ feel sad though I then realise that I shouldn't be too sad because I know I will DEFINITELY be back. I'm in the troopy on the windy roads back to Ropers Hut to unpack our bags.

My last chance to write.

All our bags are packed and our hiking things have all been sorted out. Everyone is sharing details and we are getting ready to hop in the troopy and go to Albury. I have loved this adventure so much and I really can't wait until I am back on a Follow up programm!! Thank you everyone for an amazing experience.

~[Participant G]

PS I LOVED not having any time or electricity or technology!! It was awesome :)



## Appendix VIII: List of thematic groups and sub themes

Examining data for common themes. First list, after reading and colour coding the diaries once:

### Attitudes

- appreciation
- positivity
- respecting one another
- peer review
- selflessness
- perseverance
- consideration
- self-reflection

### Physical

- physical challenge
- strength

### Simplistic lifestyle

- no clocks
- stress-free/ peaceful environment
- simple life
- no technology

### Social

- interactions
- friendships
- support
- sense of connection/ belonging
- desire to help
- team work

### Purposeful activities

- achievement (can be mental or physical or both)
- skills
- desire to learn
- knowledge
- stepping out of comfort zone
- sense of enjoyment (maybe a bit too broad since achievement and friendships etc could also fall into that category)
- contribution

### Environmental

- nature appreciation
- self-sufficiency/ holistic/ interconnected
- sustainability

## Changes after reading through the diaries a second time:

### Simplistic lifestyle

- no clocks
- stress-free/ peaceful environment
- ~~simple life~~ -> rephrased into 'reflection on convenience'
- no technology

### Environmental -> one category

added: 'expectation vs reality'

- nature appreciation
- self-sufficiency/ holistic/ interconnected
- sustainability
- expectation versus reality

### Social -> one category added: 'inspiration'

from talking to others

- interactions
- friendships
- support
- sense of connection/ belonging
- desire to help

### Purposeful activities -> 'enjoyment'

decided to be too broad, achievement moved to theme physical since mostly connected to a physical task

- ~~achievement (can be mental or physical or both)~~
- skills
- desire to learn
- knowledge
- stepping out of comfort zone
- ~~sense of enjoyment (maybe a bit too broad since achievement and friendships etc could also fall into that category)~~
- contribution

### Physical

- physical challenge
- achievement (can be mental or physical or both)
- strength
- team work
- inspiration

## Changes after inserting first three diaries into the data analysis table:

Adaptation under the 'Social' theme. The sub theme 'Team work' was found to be strongly linked to the sub theme 'support' and the two were therefore combined under the latter.

## Appendix IX: Data Analysis tables

Table created after going through the diaries thoroughly, creating a list of themes and sub-themes and putting them in order. This serves as an overview, with the numbers indicating the page and line of the quote.

### Participants A, B, C

Attitudes	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
<b>appreciation</b>	<p>1.5 thankful to Samson for carrying</p> <p>3.2 appreciating music and Leader B's guitar skills</p> <p>3.9 "some girls had made an amazing soup"</p> <p>3.15 "Leader A read us a bedtime story and a few people played songs for us. It was a very happy night"</p> <p>4.11 long-lasting memories, "beyond thankful"</p>	<p>3.12 dinner "delicious"</p>	<p>2.9 "had so much fun helping with the garden"</p> <p>3.28 "enjoy the farm days", would like to stay longer</p> <p>3.30 munchies as highlight of the hike out</p> <p>4.4 "I am really taking a lot out of all of the activities and it is such a good place"</p>
<b>positivity</b>	none	none	none
<b>respecting one another</b>	none	none	<p>1.16 lots of different people and personalities</p> <p>2.1 "true personalities"</p>
<b>peer review</b>	<p>2.17 "I think everyone is grateful to be here"</p>	none	<p>1.17 "people need to respect what they are given"</p> <p>1.23 "becoming themselves more"</p> <p>2.11 some less mature, lacking respect</p> <p>2.16 "bringing out some bad qualities as well as good"</p> <p>3.20 hypocritical</p>

<b>selflessness</b>	2.3 “I’ve learnt the importance of being selfless and doing things to help other people”	none	2.22 wants to make sth in joinery “for myself and Jen”  2.25 “just want to learn new things and help out”
<b>perseverance</b>	2.13 made necklace in joinery “but it broke 3 times”	none	none
<b>consideration</b>	none	none	3.2 passing time in cabin till others wake up, not wanting to wake them
<b>self-reflection</b>	1.24/25 “nervous at first” when abseiling  2.26/17 half-way chat made her “appreciate that we were here and encouraged me to cherish every moment”  2.19 “gotten so many skills and qualities out of it”  3.11 “made many amazing memories here[...] going to be hard to leave it all behind”  4.1 - 4.12 whole paragraph in reflection of the ten days before leaving	1.22 “If there is anything I learned from today was not to take things for granted”.  2.29-2.31 half-way chat “basically told everyone we are the same and that we won’t judge each other” -> more what she thought she should say, different effect	1.5 “even though I already appreciate a lot of things I am so glad for simple things”  2.2” I can even feel myself relaxing”  2.16 “I really want to accept everyone”, implying it is hard  3.16/17 half-way chat “weird for me because I don’t like to talk about emotions and things because I am not a very emotional person”

<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Participant A</b>	<b>Participant B</b>	<b>Participant C</b>
<b>nature appreciation</b>	<p>1.10 amazing to see different scenery</p> <p>1.21 “view at the top of the Mitta gorge was breath taking”</p> <p>1.25 “being so high up just looking at the world beneath”</p> <p>3.21 view at the top of Mount Nelse “amazing”, “stopped along many creeks and waterfalls which were all lovely”</p> <p>3.24 last day early hike “under the stars [...]watched the sunrise which was super special”</p>	<p>4.13 lunch at beautiful waterfall on hike out</p>	<p>3.5 no kangaroos this morning “but there were a lot yesterday”</p> <p>3.7 toilet in night: “the stars and milky way were so much brighter than at my house”</p> <p>3.23 wanting to drench her hair in river at sledding because “the river will clean it somewhat”</p>
<b>self-sufficiency/ holistic/ interconnected</b>	<p>1.10 about putting cow poo on vegetables “good to see how it was helping”</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>1.12 ‘the garden and self-sustainable foods and water and cooking and heating mechanisms is all really cool”</p>
<b>sustainability</b>	<p>none</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>none</p>
<b>expectation versus reality</b>	<p>none</p>	<p>2.5 shovelling horse poo and putting it on garden “Surprisingly this wasn’t bad at all”</p> <p>2.18 “Today I was awoken by an annoying rooster ...”</p> <p>2.26 “cutting wood is harder than people think”</p>	<p>none</p>

<b>Simplistic lifestyle</b>	<b>Participant A</b>	<b>Participant B</b>	<b>Participant C</b>
<b>no clocks</b>	1.6 “weird not knowing the time, but it really helps you just live in the moment”	none	2.27-2.29 “wonder what time we go to sleep because I am not tired”  3.25 “I actually slept a lot last night and actually woke up at a reasonable hour”
<b>stress-free/ peaceful environment</b>	1.15 “like another world here, so peaceful and stress free even though there is work to do”	none	1.8 “I love the simple life, this place is making me so at peace [...] enjoy being away from everything, literally leaving your troubles behind”.  1.14 “everyone should live the simple life like people used too and be so calm and relaxed”
<b>reflection on convenience</b>	1.14 “FINALLY got a hot shower”  4.4 “I have learnt how to be happy without all the extra things like technology in your life”  4.8 “I have learnt how to live life in the simplest way and still feel amazingly happy	1.5 lack of toilet as negative. “It added to the experience of MG but wasn’t that pleasant”  1.19-1.21 “my cabin started to reflect on things in life we take for granted such as flushing toilets, comfy beds, showers, warm meals and being warm and comfy in the clothes we wear”	1.4 realise all the things we take for granted  1.21 “things mean so much more in the end when you have to put time and effort in”  2.5 grateful for “comfortable bed and the food here is so GOOD”  4.5 “after being here for a few days I realise that things, all things, are better when they’re simpler”
<b>no technology</b>	none	none	none

<b>Purposeful activities</b>	<b>Participant A</b>	<b>Participant B</b>	<b>Participant C</b>
<b>skills</b>	<p>2.13 tried to make a necklace in joinery</p> <p>2.26 Milking “a weird experience but also cool”</p> <p>3.7 putting up garden fence “very difficult and tiring work”</p>	<p>2.1 Milking a new experience</p> <p>2.6 made a spoon</p> <p>3.22 learned everything for sledding</p>	<p>2.6 wants to make all oven meals at home</p> <p>2.8 “learnt a lot about soil and gardens”</p> <p>3.11 “had a lot fun chiselling and putting up the veranda” at the Winter Hut</p> <p>4.2 “enjoyed working in the forge, all of these new learning experiences”</p>
<b>knowledge</b>	<p>1.10 “good to see how it was helping” the veg</p> <p>2.11 “dung beetles which was really interesting”</p> <p>2.12 learnt about tools in joinery</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>2.3 expanding her knowledge</p>
<b>desire to learn</b>	<p>none</p>	<p>2.1 waking up early for milking</p>	<p>2.10 “I really want to go to the joinery”</p> <p>2.25 “just want to learn new things and help out”</p>
<b>stepping out of comfort zone</b>	<p>1.19 abseiling “pushed a lot of us out of our comfort zone”</p> <p>1.24 “nervous at first”</p>	<p>2.24 “conquering my fears and abseiling”, even twice</p>	<p>none</p>
<b>contribution</b>	<p>2.2 “good to know you’re helping people by cutting that wood”</p> <p>3.7 fence posts, “contributing”</p>	<p>3.9 Winter Hut:” know you had a part in creating and leaving a positive mark on MG”</p>	<p>none</p>

<b>animal contact</b>	<p>1.5 “Samson [... [ carrying our group luggage”</p> <p>2.24/25 “The cow was so friendly and nice until she tried kicking over the milk bucket and sticking her foot in”</p>	none	none
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<b>Physical</b>	<b>Participant A</b>	<b>Participant B</b>	<b>Participant C</b>
<b>physical challenge</b>	<p>1.2 hike “tough but also incredibly rewarding”</p> <p>1.20 hike to abseiling site “tough”</p> <p>2.1 chopping wood “challenging but lots of fun”</p> <p>2.9 collecting cow poo “hard work but satisfying”</p> <p>2.29/3.1 chopping and moving wood “pretty hard work”</p> <p>3.7 putting up garden fence “very difficult and tiring work”</p> <p>3.18 hike out “really tough”</p>	<p>1.3 Hike in “a challenge mentally as it was physically”</p> <p>1.13- 1.17 description of hike a spherical challenge</p> <p>2.26 “cutting wood is harder than people think”</p> <p>3.23 “water was really cold and my hands and feet were completely numb” &amp; “stuck on every rock and flipped on every second”</p> <p>4.4 hike out challenging</p> <p>4.10 Cold in tent and hard to sleep</p>	none
<b>achievement (also psychological)</b>	<p>1.13 feeling accomplished when arriving at MG</p> <p>2.1 chopping wood “challenging but fun”</p> <p>2.9 collecting cow poo “hard work”</p>	<p>1.18 best moment to enter the camp grounds</p> <p>2.25 abseiled twice despite fear</p> <p>4.11 amount of km walked</p>	1.20 finishing hike and arriving at MG
<b>strength</b>	none	2.22 Hike to abseiling site “felt like nothing after walking 2 days with a backpack that felt like it was 60 kg heavy”	none



## Participants D and E

<b>Social</b>	<b>Participant D</b>	<b>Participant E</b>
<b>interactions</b>	<p>1.18 “loved talking to everyone”</p> <p>2.8 “got to know the people in my group a lot better” at abseiling</p> <p>2.19 “dishwashing is actually a great part of the day, singing and laughing is so much fun!”</p> <p>2.20 “Before bed we sat around the fire singing”</p> <p>5.13 playing a game at night around the fire: “I haven’t laughed so hard in ages!”</p>	<p>1.25 “went to the kitchen” , “It was so fun and crazy! We all mucked around and joked”</p> <p>2.12 “split into groups + I did knitting. It was so fun, I had some really good chats”</p> <p>2.13 Everyone just really opened up and it was just really refreshing.”</p> <p>2.27 played “a duet with Participant B” on the piano</p> <p>3.3 “singing session with Leader B and Participant L”</p> <p>3.21 dress-up for roast dinner “was so funny, everyone laughed heaps and I was very happy.”</p>
<b>friendships</b>	<p>4.11 “I have got to know everyone really well which is great!”</p> <p>4.21 sad to say goodbye</p> <p>4.29 at night in the tent: “it’s really lovely to have made new friends”</p> <p>5.23 “sad saying goodbye to Leader A and Leader D, I will really miss them lots”</p>	<p>1.14 “I made two really good friends” on the hike in</p>
<b>support</b>	<p>2.23 “learning how everything worked in the joinery” (also perseverance)</p> <p>3.19 “everyone helped each other” at sledding</p> <p>4.23 about challenge of hike out: ”but we remained positive!” (*also positivity)</p>	<p>none</p>
<b>desire to help</b>	<p>none</p>	<p>none</p>

<b>sense of belonging</b>	3.6 half-way chat: "I felt so happy and secure with the people"  3.8 "it was a super special time sitting around the fire and the support and respect in our group was incredible"  4.10 "sad to be leaving. I definitely want to come back on a follow-up"	none
<b>inspiration</b>	3.28 "I would really like to learn the guitar now, he was so inspiring"	none

<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Participant D</b>	<b>Participant E</b>
<b>appreciation</b>	1.8 learnt "being thankful for the little things"  1.9 "dinner was amazing and very nutritious"  1.19 "ate fresh homemade bread from MG [...] it was delicious"  2.3 "we walked into a big welcome with yummy carrot cake" upon arrival at MG  3.21 "I'm beginning to really appreciate the food we have is"  3.27 "Leader B played guitar and sung for us all which was absolutely remarkable"  4.15 "Leader A read us a really beautiful book about thanks" (*also self-refl.)  5.3 hot porridge on a cold morning  5.16 end-chat reflection was "really special"  5.26 "it has been an incredible highlight in my life"	1.15 "I had a shower + felt better" after separation from her friends
<b>positivity</b>	4.21 sad to leave but "exciting to be heading off"  4.23 about challenge of hike out: "but we remained positive" (*also support)	none
<b>respecting one another</b>	none	none

<b>peer review</b>	none	1.6 about porridge: “it was still annoying when people refused to eat breakfast”
<b>selflessness</b>	2.28 “I loved working hard, planting veggies, that would one day feed future young people at MG” (*also contribution)	none
<b>perseverance</b>	2.23 “learning how everything worked in the joinery” (*also support)	none
<b>consideration</b>	none	none
<b>self-reflection</b>	3.7 “my goal by the end of MG is to take all the chances I get and expand my comfort zone”.  4.15 “Leader A read us a really beautiful book about thanks” (*also appreciation)	none

<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Participant D</b>	<b>Participant E</b>
<b>nature appreciation</b>	<p>1.12 waking up at dawn with the kookaburras</p> <p>1.16 incredible scenery on hike”</p> <p>1.24 “filling up our drink bottles with fresh water from the stream”</p> <p>1.27 “Once again we woke with the sun, how beautiful. Who needs time?”</p> <p>1.28 “The fog was incredible. I began to appreciate where I was walking, how wonderful the land was.”</p> <p>3.23 “warming up in the sun” at sledding</p> <p>5.2 frost on all tents “and even ice in Participant H’s drink bottle”</p> <p>5.9 Up Mount Nelse: “Oh my, the view was absolutely incredible. We could see mountains in every direction, it was beautiful”</p> <p>5.21 “hiked with the sun rising and the full moon over our heads. It was really amazing”</p>	2.4 “The view was amazing: it was a view of the mitt Mitta river and the surrounding valley of trees. It was just breathtaking.”

<b>self-sufficiency/ holistic/ interconnected</b>	none	none
<b>sustainability</b>	1.21 “each time we left a spot we would do an ‘Emu-bob’ making sure we hadn’t left a trace in the environment”  2.31 “picked dry basil and put it in jars, it was great to see how sustainable the farm was”	none
<b>expectation versus reality</b>	none	none

<b>Simplistic lifestyle</b>	<b>Participant D</b>	<b>Participant E</b>
<b>no clocks</b>	1.27 “Once again we woke with the sun, how beautiful. Who needs time?”	1.3 “we woke up at the crack of dawn [...] don’t have any watches, which I have to admit, I don’t like”
<b>stress-free/ peaceful environment</b>	none	none
<b>reflection on convenience</b>	1.9 “a main part of the day for me was handing in all of our modern day items”  3.10 “I’m really loving not using electricity, keeping life simple. I think that’s the key.”  3.23 “slightly cold showers” after sledding  4.6/7 “I found it really interesting seeing how things like the drill worked without electricity”	1.10 “Just before we got to MG we passed a road, which really annoyed me because we had to walk 20km over the past 2 days but we could just have drove”  3.19 “we then all had nice warm showers which were very luxurious”
<b>no technology</b>	none	none

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Participant D</b>	<b>Participant E</b>
<b>physical challenge</b>	<p>1.15 “hiking was hard at times, challenging”</p> <p>1.22 “after a tiring first day of hiking”</p> <p>1.28 “hike was hard, uphill and challenging”</p> <p>2.15 back from abseiling and “straight into woodchopping, it was really hard but good to get into, hearing the split of the wood was super satisfying!”</p> <p>3.15 at sledding “the water was freezing!”</p> <p>3.18 “the rapids were tricky”</p> <p>4.22 hike out challenging, “mostly uphill which was hard”</p> <p>5.2 on hike out in the morning “we woke up and outside was FREEZING!”</p>	<p>1.8 “it was nice to rest because we were all exhausted”</p> <p>3.14 at sledding “all our fingers were numb from the freezing cold water”</p>
<b>achievement (also psychological)</b>	<p>2.2 arrival worth the effort of hiking</p> <p>2.15 back from abseiling and “straight into woodchopping, it was really hard but good to get into, hearing the split of the wood was super satisfying!”</p>	<p>1.22 “I made a pretty necklace that I worked really hard on. I was rather proud of it.”</p> <p>1.27 “we made baked potatoes and everyone said they were delicious!”</p> <p>2.10 about savoury muffins they had made: “Not wanting to brag, but they were great!”</p>
<b>strength</b>	none	none

## Participants E and F

Social	Participant F	Participant G
<b>interactions</b>	<p>1.9 “I’m enjoying the company of all the girls and leaders”</p> <p>2.13 “Leader F, V1, Leader E and Leader B were all great to have a laugh with”</p> <p>2.17 “the girls were great to have a laugh with”</p>	<p>1.10 “all the new people I met were so lovely, kind and caring”</p> <p>1.22 “I had a really nice talk to Leader A”</p> <p>2.18 “all so friendly and lovely.”</p> <p>2.24 “Leader E was great to work with”</p> <p>2.31 “everyone here [...] are all so kind”</p> <p>3.6 “Leader A and I had some really great conversations”</p> <p>3.31 “J and Sparky were great”</p> <p>5.4 “great conversations with Leader A and Leader D” on hike out</p>
<b>friendships</b>	<p>1.3 “already making so many friends”</p> <p>1.16 “all the girls are becoming so close it doesn’t feel like we met only 4 days ago”</p> <p>4.17 “sadly had to say bye to Leader A and Leader D”</p> <p>4.20 “It’s so sad to say bye to all the girls”</p>	<p>5.2 “It was sad saying goodbye to Leader B”</p> <p>6.15 “I am really sad to have left Leader A and Leader D, Leader B and Samson” (*also animal contact)</p> <p>6.17 “Saying goodbye to L1 made me realise how much I have loved MG. [...] L1 was so special to me.”</p>
<b>support</b>	<p>1.13 “all the girls were able to support each other” at abseiling</p> <p>2.9 “the whole group was able to work together”</p> <p>3.23 after homesickness “everyone was really there for me”</p> <p>4.3 “we walked for a bit and then had a break because Participant R was having a rough time with her ankle”</p>	<p>3.1 “All the people around me have been continuously amazing, supportive and friendly”</p> <p>3.3 “Leader D gave me so much confidence with her comfort zone talk”</p>
<b>desire to help</b>	none	none

<b>sense of belonging</b>	none	<p>4.17 “I began to really feel how much I love MG and the simple, happy, honest way of living.</p> <p>4.24 “Everyone here is SO kind and welcoming.”</p> <p>5.1 “I definitely know I WILL be back. Follow up programmes here we come!!!”</p> <p>6.27 “I then realise that I shouldn’t be too sad, because I know I will DEFINITELY be back.”</p>
<b>inspiration</b>	none	none

<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Participant F</b>	<b>Participant G</b>
<b>appreciation</b>	<p>1.8 “the dinner was delicious!” after the hike</p> <p>2.13 enjoyment of others’ company</p> <p>2.23 “after dinner we did dishes which was fun (as it always is)”</p> <p>2.25 “then we finally got to hear Leader B sing”</p>	<p>1.23 “lunch was really yummy, with homemade bread and veggies”</p> <p>4.1 “we did DISHES!!!! YAY!!”</p> <p>4.3 “Leader B sung three of his own songs. Oh my goodness, he was AMAZING”</p> <p>4.10 “ she sung a beautiful song. She has such a lovely, lovely voice”</p> <p>5.11 “It was really nice by the fire” at night</p> <p>6.11 “Thank you so much for such an amazing journey and such a life-changing adventure/“</p>
<b>positivity</b>	none	5.23 hike out was challenging “but I found when I wasn’t thinking about how hard it was it seemed to go a lot faster”
<b>respecting one another</b>	<p>1.14 “and support whatever their decision was, whether it was to do the abseiling or not to do it”</p> <p>2.4“everyone was able to really talk about anything”</p>	none
<b>peer review</b>	3.20 hike out challenging “but I think everyone felt good” (*also achievement)	6.6 end-chat: “it was great hearing about what everybody had gotten out of MG”

<b>selflessness</b>	none	4.12 “At one section of the river I found a really pretty leaf and gave it to Leader A.
<b>perseverance</b>	none	none
<b>consideration</b>	2.15 “L1 did a great job of preparing it all for us. It tasted yum!!!”  3.4 “Participant U then ran over to grab us for lunch”	5.15 “I’m going to sleep now. Participant B and Participant Q are waiting for the pen”
<b>self-reflection</b>	2.11 “I feel like I was able to talk to a lot of girls that I hadn’t really had a good laugh with yet”  4.20 “It’s so sad to say bye to all the girls because it was so amazing getting to go through this unforgettable experience together” (*also friendship)	2.30 “I literally cannot express how I feel right now. MG is [...] incredible”  3.5 “got a lot out of her chat” at abseiling  3.15 half-way chat “made me really think about who I am as a person”  5.13 “I can’t express in my words my feelings for how much I have loved this camp.”  5.24 “Whilst I was hiking I really thought about my journey”  6.23 “All those people and all the girls have made my MG adventure so special.”

<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Participant F</b>	<b>Participant G</b>
<b>nature appreciation</b>	4.4 “had some lunch on some nice rocks we found”  4.5 “walked up Mount Nelse and that was such a beautiful view”	1.24 “incredible views”  2.2 “fresh but freezing creek water!”  2.5 “there was thick fog[...]! added to the adventure”  2.10 “The showers[...] looking out to the incredible bush.”  3.11 “The view was INCREDIBLE!” at abseiling  4.12 “pretty leaf”  5.26 “lunch at a beautiful spot next to a waterfall”  5.29 “all around me were mountains”



<b>self-sufficiency/ holistic/ interconnected</b>	none	none
<b>sustainability</b>	none	4.22 “Living sustainably was one of the amazing parts of MG that I really enjoyed.”
<b>expectation versus reality</b>	none	none

<b>Simplistic lifestyle</b>	<b>Participant F</b>	<b>Participant G</b>
<b>no clocks</b>	4.13 “Today we woke up super early. I would guess it was probably about 4-5”	1.12 “I enjoyed not knowing the time”  2.26 “I really love having no technology and no time. It’s all about living in the moment.”  7.6 “I LOVED not having any time or electricity or technology!!”
<b>stress-free/ peaceful environment</b>	none	none
<b>reflection on convenience</b>	1.8 “the shower was amazing”  2.20 we “went to the showers and it was a nice one, not quite as stressful as the first one”	1.8 after “handing in all our modern day items our journey truly began”  2.10 “The showers were really cool, looking out to the incredible bush.” (*also nature appr.)  2.11/12 Having a proper bed really makes you feel thankful”  2.26 “I really love having no technology and no time. It’s all about living in the moment.”  3.17/18 “With no electricity, modern devices we are living a simple, honest, happy life”  6.25 “Living a SIMPLE, HAPPY and HONEST life is definitely such an important message MG has taught me”
<b>no technology</b>	none	none

<b>Purposeful activities</b>	<b>Participant F</b>	<b>Participant G</b>
<b>skills</b>	none	3.27 “It was great, we melted metal and banged it into shape.”
<b>knowledge</b>	none	2.9 “Leader E told us all about the history which was really awesome”
<b>desire to learn</b>	none	2.25 “I can’t wait for tomorrow, a new day and I’m milking the cow!”
<b>stepping out of comfort zone</b>	none	3.9 “I was a bit nervous/anxious but I knew I was safe” at abseiling
<b>contribution</b>	1.21 about farm day: “I really do feel like I contributed to MG now [...] privilege”  3.3 “It’s great being able to contribute to the hut”	3.26 “We made hooks for the new Winter Hut”
<b>animal contact</b>	1.1 “leading Samson was great”  1.10 “I loved having the opportunity to walk Samson”  3.10 “then we went and got Samson and Lochy (the horses) and we got to brush them down which I’m so happy we got to do.”	1.19 we “met the beautiful horse Samson”  1.21 “partway throughout the hike I got to lead Samson which I loved”  2.6 “Samson did really well, sliding along the path!”  3.32 “Sparky was lovely and absolutely <u>loved</u> pats”  6.22/23 lists all the people that were special to her and also animals

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Participant F</b>	<b>Participant G</b>
<b>physical challenge</b>	3.20 hike up the mountain “definitely challenging”	1.24 “after a long but exciting hike”  2.4 “The hike was long”  5.4 “hike was challenging”  5.20 “Today began with a FREEZING morning! We had frost over our tent and we were all sooooo cold!”  5.23 “It was challenging”

<p><b>achievement (also psychological)</b></p>	<p>2.1 ‘we cooked lunch up which was pesto pasta and it turned out amazing’</p> <p>3.20 hike out challenging “but I think everyone felt good by the time we got to our campsite” (*also peer review)</p>	<p>2.20 “I made a necklace which was pretty cool!”</p> <p>3.10 “with some lovely encouragement I went twice”</p> <p>3.29 about the forge: “I loved trying new and different things”</p> <p>5.9 “I am very happy with my hiking, it was hard but we got it done! Yay!!”</p> <p>5.27 “It was a tough but satisfying hike with lots of hills!! But we did it!!!”</p> <p>6.3 “Reaching our final camp spot was so satisfying and I felt very proud”</p>
<p><b>strength</b></p>	<p>none</p>	<p>none</p>

## **Appendix X: Observation field notes**

### **Day 1 - Friday (15 April 2016), Albury Train Station - Roper's Hut**

Upon boarding the train from Melbourne to Albury I notice many young girls with backpacks boarding the same train as me. I wonder whether they are heading to Mittagundi (MG). Two of them are in my compartment and indeed I overhear the conductor telling them that there are more girls going to the same programme in the last compartment. He offers them to change and they agree.

I catch up with the group of girls when we leave the train in Albury. On the opposite side of the road I can see a MG vehicle and three men in MG shirts. The group of girls slows down and then stops awkwardly, too shy to cross. One of them says: "I'm really nervous now". I cross first and am greeted warmly.

We have to wait at the station for a while for the last people to arrive. The girls sit in a circle in the grass and seem to get to know each other a little. Leader F, the program leader, talks to me about the volunteer agreement that I had to sign and what is expected of me. I am slightly confused when his first question is whether I have a watch. After all the concept of 'time' is not supposed to be a part of MG. He explains that it is just needed to make sure some things happen at a certain time and as an alarm for getting up. The young people, however, can't know. He further explains that the participants are called 'young people' instead of 'children' or 'kids' to acknowledge that they are equal to the leaders but to still make sure that there is a distinction. I assume this is especially important with a view to some leaders being only 19 years old and thus not that much older than some participants.

I am joined on my volunteering mission by Tom whose family runs an organic farm near the Gold Coast. He is very interested in my research and we have a good chat about the importance of getting young people introduced to farming. In his view it is essential to teach young people how to grow their own food, cause

this is what keeps us all going. According to him, Sydney has only 3 days of food security which is shocking! Furthermore, young people nowadays don't even know how much effort it is to grow your own food.

When everyone has arrived and Liz, the director joins Leader C, Leader B and Leader F, we drive to the nearby River Park for the welcome chat and to eat lunch. First we play a game where we get to know our partner and introduce them to the whole group. Afterwards Leader B introduces the values of MG: respect, safety, fairness and fun and asks what each of them might mean in our daily life at MG and how they are important. Everyone has to say that they “agree to the Mittagundi values”. Finally it is time for the young people to hand over any medication, sweets, mobile phones or other technology. Cameras are returned after the time has been changed on them. I am surprised to see that books are collected as well. Leader C explains that sometimes young people read and don't integrate themselves in the group. The book is then more of a distraction and counteractive to the community feeling which is why they take them.

A group of middle-aged women approaches and asks whether this is MG. As it turns out they have been on a programme themselves when they were younger.

After lunch we drive to Roper's Hut, where we will spend our first night. Liz, the director, explains that the hut is on the farm land of the Roper family. The old Mr. Roper was a good friend of Ian Stapleton, the founder of MG, and has kindly agreed to let MG build a hut on his land that can be used for gear storage and those first nights. Now his son has taken over but the agreement fortunately still stands. I am thinking that Ian Stapleton must be a remarkable man and MG a remarkable institution if the friends he made at the very beginning still stand by MG almost 40 years later. The hut is beautifully located near a pond and surrounded by cow fields and an olive grove.

Upon arrival the girls get introduced to the **composting toilet**. It is met with disgust by some, with amusement by others.

At Roper's the girls have to pack their hiking gear since their town bags will be brought to MG in the trailer and they won't have access to them until we reach MG on Sunday. The leaders conduct a very thorough step-by-step gear check to make sure the young people have everything they need for the overnight hike. The leaders check with a list and tick items that need to be borrowed. Then, one by one, the young people go inside the hut where the gear is stored to get what is missing. All gear is donated to MG either by private persons or by other outdoor organisations. It is definitely not top fashion. The woollen pants for example are former army pants and most have either holes or colourful patches on them. The woollen jumpers come in all colours, patterns and sizes with and without holes. Some young people sneer at the sight of the clothes but they will learn that it is not about looking good but about being warm.

The packing process also gets talked through piece by piece, including waterproofing the sleeping bag and mat. The girls are surprisingly patient. It takes a long time but everybody seems determined to get it right. Big differences in attitudes become apparent when a discussion erupts about how much **make-up** to take on the hike and whether or not deodorant is a necessity. Some girls really take the (male) leader's opinion into account and take only toothbrush and toothpaste for the two days (Participant G, Participant D, Participant B) while others claim that they cannot live without make-up (Participant L).

After packing the girls put up the tents to make sure they know how it is done and because they sleep in them that night. Then dinner is ready (pasta prepared by Liz and us volunteers). Before every dinner we do a round of 'thank you's'. Everybody should think of someone they want to thank that day, whether they are around or not. But at the same time nobody is forced to thank anyone, as it doesn't go around in a circle. There are some good thank you statements that night, thanking

parents for early drop-offs and the MG staff for a nice day. Thank you's are followed by drum rolls and the 'performance' of the chefs that made the meal. At all MG meals second servings are only available when the last person has finishes eating. There is never any rush and everybody has to wait patiently.

After dark and dishes we all go to bed. There are no complaints from anyone since they are all tired and it will be an early start the next day.

### **Day 2 - Saturday (16th April 2016), Roper's Hut - Watchbed Creek, the High Plains - Wild Horse Creek**

We get up before sunrise and the leaders wake the girls with a song. The breakfast is porridge and this will be the breakfast meal for the next 10 days. It's quite a first challenge for some. Participant M and Participant J refuse to eat but the leaders make it clear that the serving usually is what they believe the girls need to get through the day and that they are expected to eat it. For the hike everybody gets a paper bag with the popular Mittagundi munchies and two pieces of fruit.

After breakfast we pack up the tents and clean the hut and get in the cars to drive to the beginning of the hike at Watchbed Creek, near Falls Creek. Everybody is very excited and it is a beautiful sunny day.

As we drive up into the mountains we pass ski villages. They look ugly, especially since there is no snow. They seem to be used for mountain biking in the warmer months. Liz and Tom start a discussion about the cattlemen of the High Country. I remember reading about that in Ian Stapleton's book. They used to take the cattle up into the High Plains for grazing. However, the practice had to be stopped after complaints by environmentalists about the destruction that it allegedly causes to nature. Ironically, only a few years later they started building the ski villages up there. Seeing the impact that these buildings and slopes have on the natural environment it is quite hard to imagine that the cattle should have been such a big

problem. It definitely is a big topic here in the mountain areas of Victoria and quite a passionate one, too.

Another prominent feature in the landscape are the trees that burnt down in the fires in 2006. Their grey stems and branches reach up into the sky, making the mountaintops look grey. It is a remarkable sight for me, since I have never seen such a vast area of burnt forest. You can only imagine what the blaze must have been like.

We stop for a toilet break at Falls Creek (the last flushing toilets for the next 9 days) and only 10 minutes later we reach Watchbed Creek. We are greeted by Leader A and Leader E, the two leaders that will take us on the hike in together with Leader B, and we meet Samson the horse. He is a heavy Clydesdale and will carry a good amount of our gear in his pack saddle. While the girls have morning tea and get their packs sorted, the leaders pack up Samson and then we say goodbye to Leader F, Leader C and Liz and head off. The first part of the hike follows a dirt road track and quite a few cars pass us. They are on the way to one of the historic huts which they restore. One man passes on a bike and asks whether we are headed to MG and says that both his boys also went on programmes there. While walking I talk to some girls about their farming experiences. It seems to be an integral part of the Australian (Victorian?) curriculum to have farm days at school, some even visit a farm weekly in a term. I also find out that MG is recognised by schools in Victoria as an organisation that young people can visit during school weeks. I find this very remarkable.

Some girls struggle a bit with their packs but they do not really complain. One highlight is that the girls can take turns leading Samson. There is high demand for it, even though some girls (Participant P and Participant D) are a little scared of him. We stop for lunch at Kelly's Hut, one of the historic huts that now serves as an emergency shelter (similar to Norway). Lunch on days off farm always consists of 'open wiches': Home-baked bread, typically Australian vegemite, chutney, jam



and a selection of vegetables and some cheese. It is prepared by a group of volunteers from the group. A plastic tarp is put on the ground, chopping boards and knives are put there and then they start chopping and serving. There is a compost bin bag (green dry bag) and one for rubbish (red dry bag).

What strikes me most about MG is the way they follow the **'leave no trace'** policy. After lunch there is another Emu-pick, where all the crumbs get picked up. Even apple cores do not get thrown in the bush, but have to be taken until they can be put in the compost bin bag. For girls who are menstruating they carry the so-called 'rocket', a plastic tube that contains a bin bag as well as some pads and tampons in case somebody needs it. The rocket, along with the toilet bag (contains shovel for digging a hole) is introduced at the beginning of the hike as a very natural and matter-of-fact thing to do. I personally think that this is very important and makes some worries a whole lot easier for some young participants.

Generally, the leaders explain that they go on so many programs every year that if everybody left their apple cores for example, it would cause problems for the environment. It's a good way of getting the young people to think further than just about their own impact.

It is not very far after lunch to our campsite at Wild Horse Creek. When we reach the campsite the girls put up their tents. Then there are some jobs that need to be done. One group has to collect water for hand wash and for cooking. Another has to dig a toilet, while some have to chop vegetables for dinner and another group collects fire wood. Everybody is happy enough to help. It starts to drizzle lightly but everybody is in good spirits. There is a half-rotten dead deer which is met with interest. We hear a gun shot echo around the valley, as they are hunting deer at the moment to control the deer population.

We have the usual round of thank yous (Participant G thanks Samson for carrying all our gear) and then a vegetable curry for dinner, cooked on the fire. Afterwards

as a special treat we have some hot chocolate. Then all the girls disappear into their tents quite soon.

### **Day 3 - Sunday (17th April 2016), Wildhorse Creek - Mittagundi**

Wake up before sunrise after a pretty sleepless night for me because I was rather cold. My sleeping bag is not cut out for this. We pack down our tents and then Leader B wakes up the girls with a version of “Joker to the thief”. They pack down their tents very fast and have their packs ready before breakfast.

While most appreciate the hot porridge, it poses a problem for some once again. Participant M and Participant J refuse to eat any. The MG staff express their problems with that. They tell them that they will need the energy and that despite not liking them, they should consider themselves lucky to have food in front of them. After dishes, packing the horse and checking the campsite (Emu-pick) once again for leftover foods or goods we start our second day of the hike. We cross the creek and fill up our water bottles. The water is freezing cold.

Samson has trouble crossing the creek since the water is quite deep. He needs to be unloaded, which takes a while. The girls wait patiently and no one complains. Samson is part of the group.

When Samson is packed again, we walk uphill slowly through a beautiful forest of snow gums. Some girls complain a little but not dramatically. This part is followed by a very long and steep downhill section on a single trail. It is tough on some girls because they trip on rocks. Participant R falls over but laughs it off. WE stop for lunch in a clearing at the bottom of the downhill section. Everybody is excited to continue and reach MG.

We stop not long after lunch at the Mitta Mitta river (Aboriginal word for noisy, ‘gundi’ adapted from Aboriginal word for campsite, making MG the campsite by the noisy river) for so-called ‘Ian’s chat’. It is about the history of the place that we are about to arrive at. Everybody has to sit in a circle, it is warm and sunny.

Leader A, who is doing this chat manages to make it all sound quite magical. She talks about how Ian Stapleton wanted to create a place for ALL young people, not just the rich ones that could afford Timbertop. She tells the girls about the busses that the young people slept in, about the building of the cabins together with young people and the idea of living 'simple, honest and happy'. She reminds the young people of the values that we talked about in Albury by the river. She points out that MG is also the leader's home for the year and that they are excited to share it with them but ask them to treat it and each other respectfully. One girl (Participant G?) asks what Ian Stapleton is doing today. The chat is met with interest, everybody is listening intently.

A short walk later we walk up the long driveway to the Mittagundi farm. Kangaroos jump around, the second horse neighs and trots excitedly upon seeing Samson return and cows graze in a field. We walk past an orchard, through another gate and past the Blacksmith to the main building with kitchen and lounge. It is very spacious with everything being a good walk apart. According to Leader C this was Ian's purpose because it gives you time to think about what you need whenever you go somewhere to do a job.

We are welcomed by Leader D and Leader C with delicious cake and a welcome chat. The girls are divided into cabins (mountain cabin and river cabin) and shower groups. The composting toilets are met with indifference, as in 'we know how it works'. There is a bit of surprise that two girls shower at the same time, but nevertheless everybody is looking forward to it.

When asked about the cabins, Participant B says: "It's dark. And cosy. [pause] As in there are beds and mattresses. So we take it. After the last two nights, you know [laughs]". Indeed, the cabins are the ones that Ian Stapleton first built with young people almost 40 years ago. They are log cabins and looking at them I remember reading about the struggle of putting the logs in, especially the higher ones.

There is some time off that we spend in the lounge with Participant L playing the guitar and singing and all of us as a chorus. At dinner we get served lasagna, prepared by the staff that were on the farm. It tastes delicious. The girls are bubbly and telling jokes. The clean-up after dinner is introduced, with many jobs that have to be done. There are the dishes that have to be washed and put on the drying rack, the lounge, kitchen and pantry have to be swept, the wooden tables have to be wiped with disinfectant and vinegar, the pantry and kitchen have to be mopped. Everybody is busy and all girls are eager to help.

Tom and I get explained that the staff meet for a quick check-in during breakfast and dinner clean-ups. First we share young people news if there are any, then we talk about the next day/ day ahead and finally the staff that is on stay-up duty (always two people) get final instructions if there are any.

After clean-up the girls get some information about the next day. Half the group will be on the farm while the other half will be abseiling. Every morning about 4 or 5 girls will have the opportunity to milk Arnie, the milking cow. Who goes will be decided among the girls themselves. There will be a wake-up call for milking and another one for the rest of the girls. After all this information there are some very tired faces and the girls are in bed by 9pm.

Tom and I get to stay in the 'Weekender'. It is where all the rafting equipment is stored but also has two beautiful little guest rooms with beds and a little fireplace. It is very cute.

We also get to have a hot shower. While I don't mind being unshowered, the warm water definitely feels good, especially because it is a little chilly at night.

My first impressions of the farm: the kitchen is like straight out of a museum with two wood-fired stoves. One is actually the old stove that they used at Timbertop. The pantry is very organised with labels on all cupboards, making it easier to find

what you need when you are not familiar with the place. The farm is generally very spacious with big paddocks.

#### **Day 4 - Monday (18th April 2016), Mittagundi**

I awoke before the alarm to loud possum-snores and the flutter of a micro-bat's wings on my face. For the first time Participant M eats a little bit of her porridge at breakfast. Participant G says: 'What day is this? [pause, then with a sense of wonder] I don't actually know what day it is'.

During farm days the girls are divided into groups for different jobs. They rotate, so that they get a chance to try various activities. One group is in the kitchen to prepare lunch. Another group starts off in the joinery. And the group I'm with starts the day picking up horse poo in the paddock. Even though this is an activity that some are not too excited about Participant B concludes afterwards: "That was actually fun".

After morning tea the groups swap and I join four girls in the joinery. Every girl gets to make something, for example a necklace or a spoon. Some projects such as spoons might not get finished in one session. Somebody else has the opportunity to keep working on it then. All products will get sold as merchandise to support the farm. However, the girls have the option to buy their own products cheaper on the last day at the farm. Everybody is working hard and the atmosphere is very relaxed. Participant H and Participant B work on spoons, while Participant L and Participant G make a necklace.

At lunch everybody seems happy with everybody swapping stories of what they worked on in the morning. The garden group reports that they distributed the horse poo that we collected in the morning to plant beds in the garden. It is great that the girls see the work they put in put to good use straight away. The clean-up after lunch once again takes place quickly and in good spirits.

After lunch Leader A and I take a group of girls over to the Winter Hut. In winter, there are two programmes running at the same time. Hence, the farm has to accommodate twice the amount of people and a new building is needed. The young people once again have the unique opportunity to contribute to a building where other young people will sleep for years and years to come. Jimmy is responsible for building the Winter Hut. He used to be a Mittagundi director a few years ago. The work on the hut is a bit slower paced here today. Big posts have to be put into the frame and a lot of measuring needs to be done. This means that not everybody is involved at the same time. The girls are very patient and amazed by the structure but they seem a bit bored at times. Fortunately Jimmy's Border Collie, Sparky, keeps them happy and occupied. Participant H is especially happy with her new dog friend.

Next to the Winter Hut construction site is one of the old Mittagundi busses that people used to sleep in. Leader A actually slept in it when attending one of the winter programmes as a young person only four years ago.

Another highlight is Ian's Hut, which we pass on the way to and from the Winter Hut. It is the hut that the founder of MG built when he 'retired' from MG after 10 years. It is here that he wrote his book 'Something Small'. We went in on the way back. It is in very good condition and for now Jimmy sleeps in it whenever he is working on the Winter Hut. There is an old piano in it and Participant L played and sang a song. I am thinking that Ian would be very happy about that. Generally, history is very present at MG. When we return to the farm in the late afternoon the abseiling group has returned and everybody is busy chopping wood. Equipped with protective gear everybody has a go. Participant G: "Wow, it's really satisfying when you actually split one!". Participant J mentions to Leader C that she loves the milking cow at MG. The cow is very tame and likes cuddles.

The 'Thank you's' before dinner show a lot of appreciation for each other and the work that everyone puts in.

The abseiling group seems to have had a good day. Great support for each other is mentioned in the 'thank you's'. Participant J gets a special mention for overcoming her fears. A relative of hers died while abseiling and she was very scared. She looked very proud when it was mentioned.

The lack of time is mentioned positively a few times. Participant L exclaimed proudly that they figured out they get woken up later at the farm than on the hike, because it was already light outside. I discuss with two girls (Participant O and Participant Q) that you somehow automatically get tired when it gets dark at MG. Participant M tells me proudly about the stool she made at the joinery in the afternoon. The atmosphere during dinner and clean-up is very bubbly. Participant H actually says that she loves doing the dishes.

Own thoughts: It was a satisfying day of work. It could've been physically a bit more strenuous in the afternoon but it was good fun. Now I lit a fire in my room and curled up. It is nice to go to bed when you are tired, not caring about what time it is. I saw cute micro-bats hanging in front of my room, a mum that covered her baby with her wing. When Tom and I shone a torch at them they both peeked out.

#### **Day 5 - Tuesday (19th April 2016), Mittagundi/ Abseiling site**

"We have enough of what we need and a lot more of what we want here at MG" (Leader A, staff member about life at MG).

Before leaving MG Leader D puts 10 little piles of group gear on the table. Every girl should take one. They include bread and other lunch things, toilet bag etc. There is some confusion about this as the girls partly separate the piles and things get left on the table. Reluctance?

After a short drive the abseiling day starts with a short hike to the abseiling site. Some girls moan a little about it.

Most of the girls have abseiled before, but everyone seems apprehensive. Leader D starts with a chat about personal boundaries and respecting our own boundaries as well as those of others. She also mentions some 'possessions' that help us get through things, e.g. respect, support. The emphasis is on 'challenge by choice'. Nobody has to do it. She says that she would like everyone to expand their comfort zone but explains that for some it may just be stepping onto the cliff with the harness on. Nobody will be judged if they decide not to do it but she says we all know that everyone CAN do it.

Then she shows the group how to put on the safety gear. Then we move on to a trial abseil of about 1,5 metres which is purely to restore confidence. Participant O is very scared and begins to cry before trial abseil. With encouragement she puts on the gear and tries. She then decides to also do the big abseil and even does it twice. She is very proud of herself and seems to have gotten a big boost in self-confidence (regelrecht aufgeblüht, chats a lot more).

Participant B is also very proud as it was her goal for her time at MG to complete the abseil. Everybody gets to go twice.

There is a post-abseil chat about personal comfort zones. Leader D draws some circles in the sand. the most inner circle is what we are completely comfortable doing. Everybody says something as an example. The second is what we are not quite comfortable with but we do it. The outer circle is something that scares us but that we are willing to try in order to expand our comfort zone. Leader D emphasises that what lies outside of this last circle could potentially traumatise us and cause damage. The girls are now asked to place a stick in the part of the circle where they saw the first abseil for themselves. We look at differences. Then the girls should put the stick to where they felt after the second abseil. Leader D points out that for most it has gotten easier already after doing it once.

I realise throughout the day that the activity had a great impact on some of the girls. Some really had to overcome their fear and it seemed to have a great effect



on their self-confidence. Participant O for example seemed more confident. Being quite reluctant and shy throughout the first days, she seems to chat to others more and even talk louder that night. However, I think the reflection before and after the abseil is crucial.

When we return from the abseiling there is no slacking off. Wood-chopping, gardening and cooking are on the agenda.

As we are digging away in the garden, planting lettuce, Participant G says: “Such a peaceful activity, gardening”.

Participant M is very proud after harvesting a zucchini. However, she gives up on the digging and putting plastic cover on plants after a while, seemingly frustrated.

Participant L (formerly worried about hiking without make-up, now with dirt marks all over her face) comes running over from the wood shed, excitedly laughing and yells: “We’re having dinner soon”, then opens her hand and shows us a massive 10 cm witchety grub.

After dinner this evening it is time for the halfway-chat. We all assemble at the fireplace outside to talk about where we are halfway through the programme and to set some goals for the remaining time, Leader C leads the chat.

Participant L says that Mittgundi “makes values more than words”.

Participant R: “ We have to take responsibility for your own actions. Nobody tells you that you have to do something. If you don’t do the task it’s just not getting done”.

Participant D: “The values (respect, fairness and safety) connect you to the other people, the environment and to yourself”.

Participant L: “At school you feel as if you’re wearing an emotional mask. When people here ask how you are it’s as if they really want the answer”.

Generally, many girls comment that they feel as if they have known people for much longer than the five days and that they feel like they can share everything.

Participant D: “Simple, honest and happy is what I’m getting out for myself”.

When talking about personal goals there are varied answers:

less technology (Participant Q), live life to the fullest (Participant B), positive attitude even to tough things (Participant R). The atmosphere is quite serious. The environmentally holistic concept gets mentioned a few times (Saw dust from joinery used for toilets, collected horse poo used as fertiliser for garden).

Participant H talks about the peeing in bushes, saying that “you just do it”.

Participant L comes up with a saying when talking about the group supporting each other: “There’s no ‘I’ in TEAM but there’s still ‘me’.”

Mittagundi an “emotional detox” (Participant E).

Participant R: “At home you are so wrapped up in school and everything. Here you can unwind”.

After the chat the girls go to bed relatively soon, many want to write in their diaries. Participant L hangs out by the fire for a while. She has been battling homesickness recently and is quite emotional.

### **Day 6 - Wednesday (20th April 2016), Mittagundi**

I go over to the milking in the morning. Participant H is really good at it and the milk flows well. Unfortunately Arnie steps into the bucket and we aren’t fast enough to save it, so this whole load can’t be used. It’s a chilly morning and the hands get quite cold. The teats feel warm and I perceive milking as a very peaceful activity with a very nice outcome. All the girls help repeatedly and take turns. Afterwards the udder gets disinfected and then Arnie gets to join the other cows again. The milk gets boiled at 70 degrees for half an hour and then filled into bottles.

In the morning I am in charge of the kitchen since four people are on the river for sledding. I enjoy being responsible and feeling useful. Everybody in my kitchen crew is doing their part. We have to make morning tea for the next day, munchies

for the hike (the girls are very excited about that) and lunch. Cooking on a wood-fired stoves means that you have to watch that things don't burn and sometimes it takes extra time. Additional difficulty is the absence of a timer. The atmosphere in the kitchen is good.

In the afternoon I take a group of girls to the Winter Hut again. Sparky, the dog, is a big hit again with Participant H and also with Participant G. The girls are very keen to work on the hut. We measure posts again and put them up and also put up parts of the verandah roof.

Jimmy tells me about his time at MG. Apparently they were almost self-sufficient then, but he admits that it involved eating a whole lot of turnips because they had nothing else. I'm quite impressed nevertheless. My personal opinion is that there is too much food during the programmes. We always have breakfast, morning tea (cookies or cake plus fruit), lunch (warm food if on property, 'open wiches' if off property), afternoon tea (cookies or cake plus fruit) and dinner. The young people enjoy creating food for morning and afternoon tea but that aside I don't think it is needed. Fruit would be sufficient.

After dinner we spend the evening in front of the fire in the lounge. Leader B plays guitar beautifully and plays some of his own songs. It's stunning! I'm thinking that it is only ever in an outdoor setting that you come across moments like that. It seems as if the outdoors make everybody (comfortable enough to?) share their talents.

The girls go to bed at around 8 pm. I'm thinking that I have never been to a camp where everybody is so busy all day and goes to bed voluntarily this early.

There is the eerie orange-golden glow of controlled fires visible in the hills this evening.

### **Day 7 - Thursday (21st April 2016), Mitta Mitta river/ Mittagundi**

The sledding is a fun activity which the young people seem to enjoy, but no big reflections and no obvious stretching of boundaries. Except being in the cold water for hours maybe. Everybody wears thermals and a wetsuit.

When we return to the farm the group has to start packing for the hike out. It takes longer than I would've thought. I thought they'd remember what to take and how to pack a bit better.

Participant M mentions: "I didn't even bother putting my make-up in this [points to her backpack] now". Participant L agrees, but when I ask she admits to having a tiny tube of concealer and a mascara. However, my impression is that she looks much more natural than in the first two days.

Pre-dinner we have a fun dress-up photo shoot to look nice for the roast. It is a feast!

After dinner we sit at the fire place in the lounge and Leader A reads a book. It is called "An awesome book of thanks" by Dallas Clayton. Everybody is absolutely quiet and a bit thoughtful. The twins (Participant G and Participant D) sing a beautiful duet of "I belong to you" and an indigenous lullaby. Leader B plays a song on guitar.

When we go back up to the Weekender Tom says: "There are some beautiful people out in this world Jenny". He is absolutely right!

Tonight I'm having another hot shower. It feels as good as the first time.

### **Day 8 - Friday (22nd April 2016), Mittagundi - Wild Horse Creek**

The girls get up early to wash their sheets and clean their cabins. After breakfast they get a chance to buy some Merchandise, for example the wood products that they made. Then we take a last group picture and set off on the hike out.

It is a stunning day and everybody seems excited but also slightly apprehensive about the hill that we will have to hike up. It is certainly a challenge for some. Participant M takes quite a bit of encouragement and at around lunchtime Participant R complains about a pain in her ankle. We are halfway up the hill by now and there is not much we can do apart from calling the air rescue. Since it doesn't seem too serious and she doesn't know how it happened and nothing is visible the leaders just strap it and we continue after lunch. Participant O and Participant B have a tough job too but they don't complain. We just walk relatively slowly all in all.

Participant C walks in front of me a part of the way and is amazed by the beauty of mosses that we see on the way. She tells me that she grows mosses at home in her room.

We fill our bottles at a small waterfall and the water is crystal clear and delicious.

All in all it is a tough day and a long way uphill. As Leader D puts it, it is not easy and it is not supposed to be. It should prove a challenge.

When we cross the creek and climb the final hill to the campsite we are all relieved.

The usual jobs get done swiftly but some start asking soon when they can go to bed. Before long we are having a red dog pasta dinner by the fire. It is very cold that night. After dinner and clean-up Leader D reads a book by Dr. Seuss. It is called "The Lorax" and it is about how a man destroyed nature for the sake of profit. Again, the kids listen intently. Afterwards they all disappear to bed quickly. They seem very tired.

### **Day 9 - Saturday (23rd April 2016), Wildhorse Creek - Octopus Tree Camp**

It's a freezing morning, so it's good to get going to warm up. There is a layer of ice on our tent. The girls are very quick in taking down their tents and packing up and the hot porridge for breakfast tastes delicious.

We follow the path from the hike in for a while and then turn 'off road'. It is tough on some once again. Participant R's ankle still hurts and Participant E bumps her head on a branch and is crying on the following uphill section. The walk is uphill most of the time and relatively steep. Some girls struggle and the group spreads out more as some walk faster than others.

Finally, we reach our lunch spot at a beautiful waterfall with a nice view on the mountains. Participant R calls the hike out "an emotional time with everybody crying over every little thing". Indeed, she has been crying herself, as well as Participant E.

There is another uphill section after lunch, then we drop our packs and walk up Mount Nells, the third highest mountain in Victoria. There is really quite a bit of encouragement needed for some (Participant M, Participant R, Participant B, Participant E) but we all make it and feel elated when we see the amazing view from the top.

On the hike down Mt. Nells I chat to Participant U. She was my partner in the Albury park chat when we were all getting to know each other and I remember her telling me that her friend Participant T convinced her to come. She looked a bit doubtful then as to whether she'd like it. Over the ten days she seemed to really enjoy her time, enthusiastically throwing herself into all the activities and never complaining. I ask her how she's going and she says that she's looking forward to going home and to her books but not to school. "I've learnt more at MG than in a week of school". Asked what she has learnt she meant ions working in the joinery and planting seeds. "It's just more practical than school". I ask how she's going to carry it forward to 'city life'. She says she'll definitely teach her mum how to grow garlic. Then she adds that many of the other things she's learnt are just additional knowledge and that she likes having knowledge.

It is not far to camp from here and quite cruisy. Everybody is exhausted when we arrive at Octopus Tree (an ancient gum tree that has been saved from the fires because of its age; it branches out like an Octopus). The usual jobs (putting up tents, getting water, digging a toilet, prepare dinner, collect wood) get done swiftly and without complaining. It gets cold very quickly.

The dinner crew creates an amazing performance of three witches, riding on brooms in the light of the fire, rhyming about the veggie curry they prepared. Participant H looks the part with her red hair, it's an amazing show.

After dinner it's time for the **end of programme chat**, facilitated by Leader D. We all settle around the fire, the atmosphere is of a calm seriousness once again. The first question is what they will carry forward into their 'city lives'. They mention less technology, a positive attitude, surrounding oneself with the right people (it seems in the conversation as if some girls have become the feeling that their circle of friends at home is not really good for them).

Another emotional moment arises when they talk about values they appreciate. Participant Q names 'family' and begins to cry. When she is able to speak again she explains that she realised at MG that she doesn't spend enough time with her family and that she's almost always locked in her room. Further conflict is caused by her foster brother having to leave the family soon. "They asked me whether I'm okay with that and I said yes, even though I just realised that I'm not".

Asked about highlights of the week Participant O says that she appreciated not being judged but that people got the time to get to know her.

The question where they see themselves in 5 years is interesting because some have a fixed plan already, while others are completely unsure. Participant D says she might be at MG again as a leader.

After a hot chocolate the girls crawl into their warm sleeping bags. The leaders plus us volunteers pack the saddle bags, so that we can leave straight away the next morning. In my tent I think about the whole day and realise that most of the girls were mentally already at home, thinking about what they will eat, about the hot shower. The chat in the evening was tough because everyone was cold and very tired but it is also good to reflect once again on the time here and to think about how to take something forward into 'city life'.

### **Day 10 - Sunday (24th April 2016), Octopus Tree Camp - Watchbed Creek - Roper's Hut - Albury Train Station**

We wake up before 5 am, wake up the girls, pack up our tents, load the horse and walk out of camp before sunrise. It is cold. We have to walk only about 2km to Watchbed Creek, not far from where we began our hike in 10 days ago. Everybody is eerily silent, there is hardly any chatter. The track is off road and the tufts of grass and little well-hidden creeks force us all to concentrate. As we walk the sun rises in a beautiful deep red, while the full moon is still up in the sky at the same time. It is almost magical.

On the road back at the dam we are greeted by Leader E and Leader F. They have breakfast for us: muffins and hot chocolate. Then the packs go in the trailer, we say goodbye to Leader D, Leader A and Samson (they have to walk back to MG today) and then we get in the vehicles to drive back to Roper's to return the gear. It is almost like a time-lapse. We are somehow retracing our steps back to the very beginning. We stop for a toilet break at Falls Creek and then drive to Roper's Hut. I ask the girls in our car how they feel.

Participant R: "Accomplished". Participant T: "Happy but sad".

At Roper's it takes quite a while to get all the borrowed gear stowed away. The girls change into their town clothes. Then we drive to the train station.

Back in Albury, the girls get their books, phones, sweets and wallets back. Most phones are switched on immediately. Participant J and Participant M are at one



point sitting in the grass alone playing with their phones, completely unaware that some girls whom they've spent the last 10 days with are saying goodbye only 2 metres away from them.

Conclusion: there are some that are more receptive to programmes like this and take more out of it for themselves than others.

All in all, it is an intense goodbye, with hugs and promises to stay in touch. Some girls wave all the way to the train and even from inside the train.





